





HOMING

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LILYAN STRATTON

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Lilyan Stratton.

Sun Dance Manor,
Mountain Lakes, New Jersey,
August First, Nineteen Hundred and twenty-three.



"I know Heaven is no better or more beautiful than this," whispered Stuart.

HOMING

by

LILYAN STRATTON

Author of

"The Wife's Lesson"

"Feminine Philosophy"

"Reno"

Frontispiece by

J. V. RANCK

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no. 2.

TO MY HUSBAND

IN GRATEFUL REMEMBRANCE OF HIS HELPFUL-
NESS AND ENCOURAGEMENT IN
MY WORK.

“All things come home at eventide,
Like birds that weary of their roaming,
And I would hasten to thy side, Homing”

Arthur L. Salmon.

CONTENTS

PART ONE

The wedding and early married life of Stuart Blake and Velora Allen, introducing the Sladers and Mary Langford.

PART TWO

Twenty years after the wedding of Stuart and Velora.

Memory's Mirror.

Introducing the Mansfields.

PART THREE

And then

PART ONE

NOTE: THE WEDDING AND
EARLY MARRIED LIFE OF
STUART BLAKE AND VELORA
ALLEN, INTRODUCING THE
SLADERS AND MARY LANGFORD.

Chapter 1

I

To take Stuart Blake on his wedding night at the age of twenty-one, and to understand something of the personality and character of the man, and why things happen as they do, is to necessitate becoming acquainted with the people and circumstances which influence his life.

Among those whose influence was strongest, was his school days sweetheart, Mary Langford, though the great personality of his uncle, Henry G. Slader, stood out foremost. Since a little boy Stuart had looked up to this man as a prince of the great financial world, and to follow his standard had been the boy's greatest ambition.

Henry G. Slader had come to America from a small town in Germany when he was five years old. With him his father, mother and two sisters, Magda and Eveline.

They were people of very moderate means. Henry Slader had saved and plan-

ned to get together the money that would take him and his little family to that great country America,—the land of ‘unlimited possibilities’—where his little Henry would have his chance—an equal chance—to succeed.

The country where a great fertile brain may come into its own regardless of class, capital or labor. Brain! the great mental force; the world’s driving power.”

The Sladers settled in a cottage near some friends on the outskirts of Paterson, New Jersey.

The girls—Eveline who was sixteen and Magda who was fourteen—got work in one of the great mills. Through the influence of their friends, old Slader became book-keeper in one of the mills, while Mother Slader kept everything spick and span in the little unpretentious home.

She had her serious troubles with little Henry who had to be pulled out of more fights in the street and could get dirtier than any other boy in the neighborhood, but all the same he was the prince and pride of the Slader family. Every thought was for Henry.

Henry was rapidly developing into an

independent: he was a boss fighter: could fight his way through wildcats.

He earned his first money in America at the age of seven, when he would draw a ring with a piece of chalk and give an exhibition prize-fight, to which all of his friends paid their pennies for admission. The ring was in the backyard of his home. He had an agreement with his opponent by which he divided the proceeds with him. He saved his money, each penny being carefully deposited in his bank—a green stone pig.

One day Henry found that his green stone pig was full to the brim; it wouldn't hold another cent. It was a pretty good-sized pig, and Henry had been one whole year filling it, and as he was getting tired of being the neighborhood champion, he took the pennies he had so desperately fought for, and as he expressed it, 'went into the newspaper business.'

After school hours, when he was through with a hurried supper, he sold his papers from a soap box, which he placed near the railway station in the path of the incoming passengers, among whom very soon his keenness and joviality won him popularity.

Henry had a remarkable brain and was a natural born student; he always headed his classes at school and finally rushed ahead with his studies at such a terrific rate that his fifteenth year found him a high school graduate.

By this time the soap-box news-dealer had become the proprietor of a full fledged news-stand, which could be closed up and locked at night and on which were displayed all the popular magazines and various other articles.

The boy was a big strapping athlete, his only physical defect apparently was his eyesight, which defect unquestionably was accentuated by the strain of constant study. Finally he had to wear glasses; at first only while studying, but later all the time. Because he graduated from high school did not mean that he stopped studying; he continued with the same untiring zeal.

One year after he graduated he sold his news stand at quite a profit and took a position in the office of a big Wall Street banking house.

His duties were to keep the desks of the great financier's office clean and in order;

pencils, pens, ink and stationery always supplied, and things properly dusted.

But there were things which interested Henry more than the dust which came drifting in through the windows from the great street below, and settled on Mr. M's enormous silver inkwell and expensive desk furnishings.

They were balance sheets with enormous figures; telegrams and cables which told of business transactions which meant millions of dollars; statements with figures neatly written in red ink, five and six figures glaring up at him as though they were written in blood, shelves filled with books containing valuable information.

One day the great financier called in his office manager and pointed to the thin layer of dust over his desk, the stationery which had not been replenished, and the inkwell actually dried up.

"You will have to get another office boy, Craig; I can't be annoyed with this numbskull. I have spoken to him three times about his carelessness. He said his eyesight is bad and he could not see the dust.... I was sorry for him and let it go, but I can't be annoyed any longer!"

II

Henry could not see the dust, but he could see the figures following the dollar sign, and while he did not gather up much dust he did gather up much information.

He continued to study, he took a secretarial course in a New York night school, and finally, after holding various different positions, became private secretary to one of the biggest railroad financiers in the country. He remained in that position for three years, continued saving his money, and at the age of twenty-five opened his own office in Wall Street. The brass plate on the door announced: "H. G. Slader, Investments."

In the meantime his elder sister, Eveline, had been married to Walter Blake, the serious young minister of the church the family attended in the suburbs of the old factory town. Their marriage had been blessed with two children.

It was in later years that Reverend Blake had managed to be transferred to the village church near his old homestead at Valley View.

Henry's younger sister had died of pneu-

monia during their second year in America, and as soon as things began to come his way he moved his mother and father into a comfortable flat uptown, forever leaving behind them the early struggles.

From then on his success became one of the outstanding features in Wall Street.

Chapter 2

I

On Stuart Blake's wedding night the home of the millionaire railroad financier, Henry G. Slader, was a blaze of light. Perched among other palaces of wealth on Riverside Drive, its brilliant lights reflected on the shadowy Hudson River far below.

It was just twenty-two years since Henry Slader, the little Paterson newsboy, had moved his mother and father to New York, and had gone into business for himself.

He had married fifteen years ago into a family of great financial influence, but no children had blessed the union, and he idolized his nephew Stuart Blake, who displayed many of his uncle's characteristics—a fact which was very pleasing to the latter.

The Reverend Blake and his family were house guests at the great Riverside mansion until after the wedding.

In the banquet hall there were covers laid

for over a hundred guests. With the exception of a few close friends of the Blakes, the guests were friends of the Sladers. People of power in the financial world; not of the four hundred set, but of the thousands of brain workers of the great army of commerce.

The immense hall of the big house had been turned into a June rose garden; an improvised altar had been formed at one end of the big room under a bower of pink bride's roses and Southern smilax. All the lights were shaded by rose-colored wedding bells.

Behind a group of marvelous palms a sweet voiced soprano sang "Oh Promise Me," accompanied by a stringed orchestra.

Then from the great organ in the music room beyond came the strains of the wedding march from "Lohengrin," and the hangings were thrown back to admit the bridal procession.

There was a little thrill of admiration as the guests beheld the beautiful little bride. Leaning on the arm of her future husband's uncle she looked like a lily clad in rainbow robes.

Stuart received his bride with a smile which was heavenly to see.

When the Reverend Walter Blake in his clear sincere voice began to read the service, there was something beautifully solemn in the whole atmosphere as he said:

“Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the face of this company, to join together this man and this woman in Holy Matrimony; an honorable state instituted of God in the time of man’s innocence, signifying unto us the mystical union that is betwixt God and His Church; which holy estate Christ adorned and beautified with His presence and first miracle that He wrought in Cana of Galilee and is commended of Saint Paul to be honorable among men; and is therefore not by any to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly; but reverently, discreetly and in the fear of God!”

“Into this state these two persons present come now to be joined. If any man can show just cause why they may not lawfully be joined together, let him speak now or hereafter forever hold his peace”

As the ceremony went on to the end Mary (Little Saint Mary as she was usually

called), the deserted sweetheart of Stuart's boyhood, sobbed out her heart, her face buried deep in the sweet fresh June clover down behind the old spring-house at Valley View, with only God as witness to the anguish in her heart.

In the mansion on Riverside Drive happiness reigned supreme.

Velora Allen, who had deliberately stolen Mary Langford's lover, was a beautiful and happy bride. It was her supreme moment. In a whirl of lace and flowers and music she was a queen reigning on the throne of love and beauty.

She loved Stuart in her light little way; he was a dear fellow; he was clever, and generous, and a divine dancer. She had been taught that it was just as easy to love a man with the possibility of a brilliant future as a good-for-nothing ne'er-do-well.

After the wedding supper the bride and groom were escorted by a few of their friends and relatives to the big ocean liner, which was to sail for Europe at seven o'clock the next morning.

Stuart's uncle had planned to send his nephew abroad for three months to study and report on railroad conditions in Europe;

also to make business connections there as the representative of his uncle's firm. It was to be a sort of combination business trip and honeymoon.

II

It was two o'clock in the morning when Stuart, very softly knocked on the door which connected his stateroom with that of his bride's. As there came no answer, he gently opened the door.

He expected almost anything, but what greeted his startled eyes.

Her traveling suit had been hurriedly thrown on a chair, her shoes and stockings were in the middle of the floor; hats, gloves and bits of fluffy lingerie were carelessly thrown about and on the bed; sound asleep was his bride.

✦ She was a fairer vision of loveliness than he had ever dreamed of. The June breeze drifted in through the open window and toyed with the golden ringlets about her rosebud face. Her beautiful hair had been loosened and flowed out over the pillow, forming a golden, shimmering mass to receive her statuesque little body.

There she lay like the tired little butterfly she was, robed in a garment of pink-tinted fluff, which might have been fashioned from the gauzy wings of butterflies; every soft, perfect curve of her delicate body gleaming through its transparent beauty.

Stuart leaned against the door and feasted his eyes on this beautiful possession of his. Her exquisite breasts like two tropical flowers behind a rose-colored cloud: how we would admire them on a sculptured statue in the art galleries, but how much more wonderful in the soft living loveliness of God's own creation.

"God's own masterpiece of creation," thought Stuart, as he gently bent over and gathered her in his arms like a delicate flower. X

She fluttered a little like a captured bird, but he drew her to his glowing heart and pressed his burning lips to hers until she lay submissive in his strong arms.

And so Fate added another to the list of those who mistake the damning desire of manhood for the pure love of a clean heart. Another who was to face the tragedy of disillusionment, when physical attraction is no more to light the fires of passionate appeal!

III

The voyage was a happy one for the bride and groom. Velora enjoyed being petted and spoiled by her adoring husband. She enjoyed the novelty of being a bride; the whispers of the passengers as she passed by leaning on Stuart's arm; she knew they were saying: "There goes the bride and groom."

Sometimes she would catch a word: "Isn't she a pretty little thing?" or: "They seem to be very devoted," or: "Surely there is nothing like love's young dream!"

She enjoyed all the pretty clothes; the tantalizing fluffy feminine things which she donned in the privacy of her room; she loved to be able to excite that flame in her husband which burned until his whole body was aglow, and he would crush her madly to him and drink deep of the wine of her red lips and feel her heart throbs against his breast: the mad ecstasy of Youth. . . .

Chapter 3

I

For hours Mary Langford lay out under the canopy of stars. She drenched the sweet clover blossoms with her tears on Stuart's wedding night. She rejoiced at the dead day; to the night she gave a glad greeting; it brought sweet solace to a tortured soul, for in its dark shadows she could hide her grief.

What is death compared to the agony of a breaking heart and a tortured soul?

To Velora it was a night of joy and gladness: to Mary it was a night of sorrow, suffering and tears. To her it seemed that even God had forgotten. But "Surely, the Great Invisible King knoweth best when and where to weave joy and despair into the scheme of things," thought Mary, "and in His divine wisdom He knoweth that sorrow is but the real test and real happiness its sure recompense;" but no philosophy could ease the pain in her heart at that moment.

To Mary life was a black chaos; her heart was sick and sore; her mind distorted. She dug her fingers into the tall damp clover and whispered: "I am going mad; my brain can't stand the aching of my heart."

To her distorted mind it seemed that Hell had given up all its shriveled souls, to gesture and mock at her in fiendish glee. Goblins glared and gibed from out of the gloom; monstrous bats, fierce-eyed and heavy-winged, flitted hither and thither; everywhere wreck and ruin, desolation and black despair. . . .

II

Storm-clouds hid the stars, and out of the black night there came no sound but the sob of a breaking heart. . . .

Suddenly, the storm broke. The wind in the tree tops roared, shrieked and groaned. The branches cracked and bent, and big raindrops beat down through the darkness.

Through it all Mary lay as though numb and half dead, recalling all the happy days of her childhood, crushed by the disappointment, heartache and despair of the present.

The storm without was nothing to the storm raging within her heart. She turned and let the wind and rain beat on her face.

The thunder rolled and roared; the wind whipped the trees and bent the clover at her feet; fierce flashes of lightning ripped gashes in the black sky.

"The wind, the trees and the storm are all my friends," she thought; "they are doing all my screaming and beating for me. It is the most glorious battle I ever witnessed."

A great flash of lightning struck a nearby oak, splitting its sturdy body from the topmost bough to its huge trunk.

As the storm raged on, it seemed to soothe her troubled soul. She lay there perfectly still until it was over.

Presently the moon came gliding out from behind the clouds flooding the storm-tossed forest with silvery rays, and in its glorious light Mary's agonized soul rose to the infinite oneness with God.

Mary felt that she had never been so near the Divinity; she knew that the Great Redeemer had not forgotten. A great peace had come into her heart. As she rose in ecstasy and stood in holy admiration of Na-

ture's majesty she knew that she was going to take up her cross and bear it bravely to the end. . . .

III

She rose and started down the wet woods lane, running every step of the way home, her clothes dripping, and her hair streaming.

Upon arriving at the house she tiptoed in and, after a hot bath, donned a warm dressing gown, threw open the old French windows, and stepped out on the balcony into the serenity of the June night.

There was no sign of the recent storm except the perfume of the rain-drenched roses and jasmine from the old-fashioned garden below.

The hills were forming a shadowy crescent around the bend of the river. The moon was its silveriest and greatest, as it touched the pine trees with mellow light, and glorified the beauty of the landscape.

Though actually suffering, there came to Mary such an unspeakable ethereal lightness and buoyancy; such a thrill of joy as she gazed out on all this quiet beauty of God's creation, that even pain was pleasure.

She stood a long time in silent admiration. Then out of the silence, came the call of the whip-poor-will. . . . "Whip-poor-will—whip-poor-will!"

"What a wondrous thing is hope," thought Mary, "how easily it overcomes all obstacles; bridges oceans; spans continents; gilds transgressions and rights wrongs; achieves the impossible, and paves the future with golden promise!"

And with what sweet insistence the melody of that night bird appealed to her, as though it were the echo of all her hopes, desires and love, crying out.

"Live! live! Is there not still another day in which to undo? Another horizon whose skies of blue will help me forget: another leaf in life on which Fate may write her kindest message after all?"

And again came the call of the whip-poor-will, and once again, farther away this time, out of the dim distance, . . .

"Whip-poor-will! Whip-poor-will!"

Out of the quiet beauty this great and helpful philosophy came to the assistance of poor little Saint Mary:

"Disappointment is oftentimes a two-edged blade, and yet if the 'wound never heals,

time cures the hurt. That, for which we strive most is not always best, and life is always well worth living if we play our part well."

"Loss of hope means decay. No matter how precious the treasure lost, duty stands ever on guard, pointing the way to human helpfulness; to action and interest. Not to brooding discontent nor to sullen surrender, but to love and not to cynicism."

"I have my music, my flowers and all of God's glorious out-of-doors, and I shall ever keep a great pure love within my heart. I shall rise above yesterday, because I know that God is Love and all is well."

"Behold,—another dawn" . . . and as Mary closed her window and knelt to pray she heard the low and plaintive call . . . "Whip-poor-will": it seemed like a pledge of the fulfillment of her prayer. . . .

Chapter 4

I

Stuart was well established in Tennessee. He had worked hard and success was crowning his efforts. His uncle had made him vice-president of a railroad down there of quite some importance.

The first year had been a very happy one for the Blakes. They had rented a beautiful old colonial place, the beautiful Mrs. Blake had become quite a society queen, and young Blake was well liked among the men.

He had become known as a hustler and a man with grit; with the courage of his convictions.

But, life is not meant to be clear sailing from the cradle to the grave.

At the close of the first year of her marriage, Velora knew that she was to become a mother. The knowledge rather annoyed her; she wanted children because she really wanted to please her husband and she knew

he longed for a son, but, "why must it be now?" she thought, "just when I am having such a wonderful time, and I shall be obliged to miss all the gaiety of the social season! I shan't be able to go out at all next winter! What a nuisance!"

Then, for the first time since she could remember, she wept a little: finally she decided to keep her secret as long as she possibly could, even from her husband.

In those days the wasp-like waistline was in vogue, and, with the help of the corset lace, Velora actually concealed her condition for three months. At last she was obliged to tell her husband, and as she began to get a little nervous and afraid, she asked Stuart to send for her mother.

II

Mrs. Allen arrived a month later. She was a sensible woman, who had obtained her wisdom in the hard, cold, cruel school of experience. She found Velora still lacing into her beautiful tight-waisted gowns, fluttering out to all the social functions, and immediately took the situation in hand.

Two more bedrooms were brought into

service at once; one for Mrs. Allen and one for Stuart. Old Uncle Bill and Aunt Harriet were kept on the go, airing and cleaning, and getting the nursery done over.

Mrs. Allen was looking forward with much joy and excitement to her first grandchild.

She crocheted, and knitted, and hem-stitched, until the sewing room looked like a display sale of infants wear.

For the first time since their marriage Stuart and Velora occupied separate bedrooms, and, as has happened many times before in the lives of husbands and wives, they never again shared the same bedroom. There was nothing ever said about it; they just didn't.

Mrs. Allen insisted that Velora should dispose of the tight corsets and gowns; that she should dress in such a way as to insure the health of herself and the expected child.

Under protest Velora accepted the situation, canceled all social engagements and dressed as her mother advised.

Stuart was glad of this for many reasons. It would give him evenings at home and enable him to work; he had to make good now more than ever, and for a young fellow

starting out with the responsibility of a family, and a rather important position, to make good meant hard work.

He still adored Velora, or at least thought he adored her; though in reality it was only her prettiness which charmed his youth, and was to be the great tragedy of their union.

At last the eventful day arrived. The stork called on Velora one bright chilly March morning, just as the sun peeped up over the hills to bring its light and warmth to the awaiting world. It was just possible that Velora had never had her wonderful big violet eyes open so early in the morning before. . . .

“What a strange thing is Life,” thought Stuart as he sat down-stairs as so many anxious husbands and fathers have done before, anxiously awaiting for news from the chamber of the miracle of life.

III

“Why should we be born of woman’s agony? Sheltered and nurtured only to pay a final debt in full,” thought Stuart, as he pondered on. “Always striving for the unattainable,—damned by desire and consumed with dread.” . . .

Consumed with dread he was, afraid for the life of his beautiful little wife.

He rose and paced up and down the floor.

“What a fearsome thing is life,” he thought; “if that little woman should die I would feel like a murderer.”

Just then an agonizing scream rent the stillness followed by a baby’s feeble cry, and a great, “Thank God,” came from the lips of Stuart Blake. It was breathed from his very soul.

For two hours,—hours that had seemed like years, he had waited there in fear and dread while the doctor and old colored nurse fought to save the life of his wife and first born; he was grateful for that agonizing scream that told him his wife still lived, and the feeble little wail which conveyed the news of Motherhood.

In the room above, old Aunt Harriet was saying: “Mrs. Allen, yo’ jes’ go down an’ tell poah Mr. Stuart dat he’s got a boy, an’ den yo’ lay down a spell. I kin tek care of ’er now. I’s gwine ter wash an’ dress de chile whilst she’s drapped off ter sleep.”

She turned to the doctor, “Yo’ better tek a little res’ too.” She opened the door to a spare-room and motioned him in.

For twelve hours they had not left the side of Velora's bed and the last two hours her life had hung by a thread. Now that the danger was over, they all began to feel the severe strain and were glad to leave things in the hands of old Aunt Harriet, whose store of energy and strength seemed inexhaustible.

"I believe I will take a little rest," said the doctor, "but don't forget to call me the moment Mrs. Blake awakens."

Velora's mother went downstairs and smiling through her tears informed her son-in-law that he was the father of a boy, and that his wife would live, though the confinement had been a very dangerous one.

They rejoiced together for a few moments, and then Stuart went out to telegraph his father, mother and uncle.

"Its a boy. Mother and son are doing well," the wire ticked off.

Two hours later Aunt Harriet appeared in the living room with all the importance of a black princess.

"Yo' kin come an' see yoah chile. Fo' de Lawd's sake, Mr. Stuart, yo' sho' do look like you done had dat chile yo'self!"

"Instead you settin' here takin' yoah ease

wile we-all bin strugglin' ter bring dat chile inter de wol' widout killin' off both of 'em. You sho is as pale as a ghost. I 'speck you ain't had no breakust. You jest better spruce up a bit befo' Mis' Velor' see you; she's awake an' askin' fo' you."

Stuart's face lighted up at this information.

"All right, Aunt Harriet, I will tidy up a bit; please tell Mrs. Blake that I shall be up to see her in a few moments."

IV

Stuart tip-toed into Velora's room a few minutes later. He saw the little lace covered bassinette with its blue ribbons near the bed, and Velora's mother sitting beside her.

"How is she now?" he whispered anxiously.

"All right I think, but it was terrible," and Mrs. Allen's drawn face with its aged lines showed that she had gone through acute suffering while witnessing her daughter's agony.

Slowly Velora turned her head and opened her beautiful violet eyes. She was very pale and fragile looking.

Stuart leaned over and kissed her.

"How are you feeling dear?" he whispered, holding her hand very gently in his.

"Better," she whispered, "have you seen the baby?"

Mrs. Allen rose and left the room quietly, leaving the two young people together with their great mutual joy.

"I hope he is a fine boy, Stuart, and will bring us much happiness. He almost cost me my life," whispered Velora, as Stuart gazed down at the sleeping little bundle of humanity which had been responsible for so much suffering and anxiety during the past twenty-four hours.

"Well, he doesn't look like much of a man just now," said Stuart with a rather happy smile, "but he may be president of the United States some day, you know!"

They both looked at the wee little face, and Velora smiled too. . . .

Chapter 5

I

Stuart Blake went back to his work with more energy and determination than ever, when he knew that his wife was out of danger, and things were back to normal again at home.

He worked far into the night, and eight o'clock each morning found him at his desk.

Did he ever think of his boyhood sweetheart during this busy rush of life? Had he ever realized for a single moment how madly and sincerely she had loved him?

He had thought of her, but only casually. He knew that she loved him, but he knew nothing of the quality of love which she bore him.

Her love was like a flawless jewel, discovered among thousands of jewels of lesser value.

When he thought of her at all, he thought that she would forget him and be happy with someone else, as so many others have done.

Youth is often selfish and superficial because of its inexperience.

Stuart had never gone below the surface of Mary's character, therefore he knew nothing of the depth of feeling, the endurance and the constancy in her spiritual personality.

With the cares and struggles, joys and sorrows and anxiety of his busy life, he almost forgot his boyhood sweetheart, as many of us often forget dear friends under similar circumstances, until some happy memory or some great need brings them back to us.

Velora nursed her child, though she remained an invalid for several months. The child was puny and fretful, and the doctor said he would surely die unless nursed by the mother. He was a scrawny delicate child, hard to keep alive. He was named after Stuart's uncle, the great New York financier, and was called Henry Stuart Blake.

He immediately acquired from his uncle a bank account and several thousand dollars worth of railroad shares, by way of encouragement to live.

Henry was the idol of his father and of

the entire household, but a constant anxiety because of his health.

After three months of uninterrupted worry and careful nursing and care the little sufferer was stricken with convulsions, and one evening during a serious attack, uttered a feeble little protest—the same feeble little wail which announced his birth—and passed away.

II

Over his little white coffin in the darkened living room, Stuart stood up like a man under his first great sorrow, holding the weeping little mother to his heart, trying his best to comfort her.

The baby's death had been a greater blow than any one realized. Stuart had not been prepared. He had had a very smooth life. He was twenty-three years old and he could not remember a day's real sorrow in all that time. He was wholly unprepared for the tragedies of life, and therefore they were much harder to bear.

The grief over the death of the baby was perhaps the first real emotion Velora had ever known. She was really heartbroken

as she stood by the little casket and sobbed:

“My little angel, why has God taken you from me?”

One can see a woman grieve and shed tears, yet it does not wring the heart as much, as when one looks upon a strong man fighting against an overpowering sorrow. It would have wrung the heart of a stone, to see that strong, fine, young father struggling against this first overpowering grief of his life: to watch the cords of his neck swell and contract; to watch him choke back the lump in his throat; to look at his white compressed lips and set face; to see his eyes turned red with unshed tears; to witness the heart-rending sorrow of a father over the casket of his first born.

As Mrs. Allen watched this scene with an aching heart, she thought, “How strange the scheme of life! Why was this little life that came into the home, heralded by a great joy, to go out so soon, leaving only a trail of sorrow? Is it true, that there is never a smile which does not foreshadow a sob and tear?”

A little grave in the cemetery on the side of a green sloping hill, marked by a monument supporting a beautiful sculptured

angel . . . a tiny baby angel with spreading wings, as though it were prepared for its flight to Heaven was all that remained to them of the joy and sorrow of the past few months.

III

The bloom of youth had deserted Velora. A yellowish pallor had taken the place of that delicate rose-tinted glow. Nursing her baby for three months, and the agony of its birth, and the worry and grief of its death, had completely exhausted the golden butterfly and sapped the bloom of youth.

She looked like a faded rose whose beauty and freshness might be revived with gentle care, fresh cool water and a shady place.

Stuart was positively alarmed. The thing he had worshipped and adored—Velora's exquisite beauty, that wonderful glow of youthful charm as luscious and inviting as a tropical peach—was vanishing before his very eyes. . . .

While the baby had lived, the care and anxiety for his son had occupied his attention, but now, there were just two things in his life: Velora and his work.

IV

A month after the baby's funeral, Stuart approached the subject of Velora's health.

"You are looking dreadfully run down, dear," he said. "The past few months have been too much for you and I don't wonder. We must do something about it."

Velora went over and curled up in her husband's lap like a pet kitten and cried down his collar. She had become a weak, nervous, weeping woman.

"You are not at all complimentary," she said through her tears. "That's only a nice way of telling me that I look awful. I don't think you love me any more!"

Stuart was very gentle with her. He thought of those past few months of anguish and he patted her head soothingly.

"There, there," he whispered, a world of sympathy in his voice. "How can you say such a thing, when I am only thinking of something I can do to make you better and happier! Now listen: how about a change? This is the last week of August. Suppose you and mother go up North for a while. You can have two weeks at Atlantic City; the ocean breeze will soon fan back the roses

to your cheeks and you can have a few weeks in New York, see all your old friends and do some shopping and then bring back to me my Velora with the sparkle in her eyes and the roses in her cheeks! How about it?"

Velora dried her eyes and looked at him. "Stuart dear, that would be wonderful for me, but how about you? What will you do?"

"Why, I shall have my work, and the joy of knowing that I have sent you on a health-gathering errand. Those two things will be enough for me, until you return."

"I hate being so selfish, dear," said Velora, "and I'm ashamed of my weakness, but I am just I, and it can't be changed. I would love to go, and perhaps you are right. I shall be able to return, feeling my old self again. Thank you dear! I will go and talk it over with mother."

She uncurled herself, slid out of his lap and went gliding out of the room like a tired shadow. . . .

Chapter 6

I

There was a very small informal bridge party at the home of Constance Carlton.

Mr. Carlton was a business associate of Stuart Blake, and Constance had been one of the first friends Velora had made upon her arrival, and she had proven a very loyal friend.

Four tables had been arranged in the living room of the Carlton home and fifteen of Mrs. Carlton's friends were assembled for a pleasant afternoon at their favorite pastime.

"I asked Velora to come this afternoon!" Constance announced as they were about to be seated.

"Poor dear, I called to see her yesterday and she did look so pathetic."

"I have not seen her for weeks," said Caroline Adams. "They say the poor girl had a terrible time, and to think they should lose their baby after all!"

Rosamund Miles turned from the next table to join the conversation.

"No wonder they lost the child. She just about killed it before it was born. Poor little thing. I think it was a sin and shame, the way she pinched her waist into twenty-two inches until about four months before the baby was born."

"Well," replied Constance, "she paid for that mistake very dearly! Of course it was the poor child's inexperience; she just did not know any better, and she kept her secret until her mother's arrival. Her vanity nearly cost her her own life as well!"

Eveline Lawrence, who was seated at the table with the hostess, remarked at this point; "Mrs. Blake is rather late, is she not?"

"She is not going to play," replied Constance, "but I made her promise to come in for a moment at tea time. She has not been out at all since about two months before the baby's birth; that is about seven months ago."

"She said it would be a chance to say 'hello' and 'good-bye' to some of her friends. She is leaving to be away a month or more. Going to Atlantic City and New York with her mother. They were packing when I

called. She says her husband insists that the change will restore her health!"

"A most thoughtful husband," replied Rosamund Miles. "I feel rather relieved. I was afraid she would blossom out among us again in all her glory. When she is at a party she simply spoils my whole evening, because my husband just will make a fool of himself the minute he lays his eyes on her; he follows her around like a man hypnotized."

"I came upon them one evening out there on your balcony, and that poor boob of a husband of mine was actually holding Velora's hand and looking pensively at the moon. Not that she encouraged him, but some men, just like some women, must make fools of themselves, and poor Bob has arrived at the dangerous age."

"Well, well," laughed the hostess. "Who ever would have thought of you being jealous?"

"Jealous?" shouted Rosamund in amazement, "don't be absurd Constance. You know very well I couldn't be jealous; not of poor old Bob anyway, but I don't enjoy being made a fool of. Somehow I believe I felt just the way Bob would have felt, if

he had come upon me, holding hands with one of his men friends."

"Well, I am sure Velora is not a flirt," replied Constance. "In spite of the fact that she attracts all the men around her the moment she enters a drawing-room; it's only her exquisite beauty that can't help but attract. It is not her fault, and one can't blame the men either. She is very much like her nickname, the Golden Butterfly!"

"Golden Butterfly? Indeed!" piped up Eveline Lawrence in a thin sharp voice. "She had better look to her laurels. I passed her on the street a few days ago, and she looked puffy and sallow; she looked more like a butterfly which is just ready to shed its wings and submerge into the caterpillar stage."

"The trouble with butterflies is, that most of them don't stay butterflies, unless they die young. The most beautiful will only remain so for a short time, then they become fat, fuzzy worm-like creatures, and greedily feed on their appropriated food!"

Eveline Lawrence was the dark slender brunette type. She had been a true Southern beauty in her time, but there were shadows under her once sparkling eyes, and hol-

lows had appeared in the once smooth rounded cheeks. Eveline, like so many others, had not discovered the secret of growing old gracefully.

She was jealous of youth and bitter at the loss of her own beauty. Her sarcastic speech about the Golden Butterfly quite shocked Constance.

"How perfectly horrible," exclaimed Constance, "how can you have such a poisonous thought, Eveline?"

"It may be poisonous, but it's true," replied Eveline.

"Velora is not the type that will ever look really unattractive," said Rosamund, who was a pretty young brunette, "but she is just a feather-brained little idiot, who doesn't know any better than to have children. The inevitable result of that for her type is, that she will lose her figure and her husband at the same time, because the poor child will have nothing left to take the place of her physical attraction!"

"Velora is one of those blanc mange, bon bon eating, French pastry loving blondes, who at forty, will spill over like a charlotte russe. She has begun to get puffy already," said Eveline.

II

Just then Velora was ushered into their midst by the old "Uncle Tom" of the family, who had opened the door of the Carlton house to welcome guests for over forty years.

They had just finished four hands at the hostess's table and were waiting, so they rushed forward to greet Velora.

It was quite a different Velora to the girl who had come among them more than two years ago. She had rouged for the first time, so that her white lips and sallowness were concealed behind rouge and powder, but the shadows were still visible under her tired eyes.

She looked much stouter because she did not dare to draw in her corset tight and she was obliged to wear a brassiere.

As always she was beautifully and fashionably dressed, but in black; a soft clinging crepe meteor, which was most becoming.

For the first time in many months Velora laughed and chatted with her friends in the usual way. She was in her natural environment.

III

The first Sunday in September was a most oppressive, sultry day in the Tennessee town; the sun shone blisteringly hot.

In the old colonial house which the Blakes had called "Home" since their arrival there, the rooms were cool and comfortable, because of the wonderfully high ceilings and thick brick walls. The old-fashioned green slatted shutters of the high French windows were half closed, making a refreshing cool shade for the rooms. Trunks and hat boxes were packed and ready in the hall, and all was in order for Velora's departure.

On Saturday Stuart had arrived with reservations and railroad tickets; he had also brought home the balance sheets of the last three months of his road.

He had rushed up to Velora's room with more enthusiasm and cheerfulness than he had displayed in months. He would show the balance sheets to Velora; she surely would rejoice with him in the success of his business efforts; for the past three months the balance sheet showed an advance of twenty-five per cent in profits.

He had knocked at Velora's door: the an-

swer had been more like a muffled sob than a response. He had opened the door, entered, and beheld Velora lying there with her face buried in a pillow to smother the sound of her sobbing; hysterical. . . .

Stuart had dropped his portfolio and rushed to the bedside.

"What is the matter, Velora dear? Please tell me," he implored, and lifted her up in his strong arms.

She lifted her face to his: she was trembling in every limb. The startled look in her eyes alarmed him even more than her tears.

"Tell me, Velora, dearest; don't keep me in suspense. Is there anything I can do?"

"Oh, Stuart, I am so frightened. I—I am to become a mother again, and this time I shall die; I know I shall," she breathed. Before he realized it, she had fainted and was a crumpled little heap at his feet.

He gathered her in his arms, laid her on the bed, and rang for Aunt Harriet.

"Did yo' ring sah?" asked Aunt Harriet a few minutes later.

"Yes, will you ask Mrs. Allen if she will please come here as quickly as possible? And will you bring some ice water and a

little brandy please, Aunt Harriet? Mrs. Blake has fainted."

"Yes sah, yes sah, . . . poor chile," mumbled Aunt Harriet as she hurried away.

By Sunday morning, Velora had become quite normal again, under the practical influence of her mother. She was a weak personality; she needed her mother for ally and support, now even more than when she had been a tiny tot learning to take her first step. Though utterly dismayed at the thought of the horrors of the birth of her first child, still fresh in her mind, her mother had a soothing influence over her.

The train which was to take Velora and her mother North, left at six-thirty Sunday evening from the Union Station.

Under the newly discovered condition, Stuart was more pleased than ever, that Velora would be able to enjoy a change of climate and environment; he was really distressed about her.

After luncheon, with a pathetic little droop to her mouth and threatening tears, Velora suggested that Stuart drive out to the baby's grave with her.

“The sun is so hot and I feel so weak, I don’t feel equal to the walk!”

“Certainly dear,” replied Stuart gently. He called the carriage, while Velora went into the garden to gather flowers to place on the little mound in the shadow of the mountain.

The moss-draped trees hanging in dreamy silence over the river’s edge looked somber and mournful. The herd of cows which lazed underneath their sheltering shade looked out listless and sorrowful.

The few cardinals and bluebirds fluttering about in the moss-covered trees, seemed only to accentuate the sad dreariness of things with their brilliant colours against so much gray drooping moss. . . .

Poor Velora! Under the torture of the great mental strain she had begun looking at things through drab-colored glasses instead of rose-colored ones.

“The City of Happiness is in the State of Mind!”

IV

They had been rather silent on the little farewell journey to the grave of their first born. Sometimes silence means so much

more than words. There are times when heart speaks to heart in silent sympathy more eloquently and more meaningly than a world of words.

At the entrance Uncle Bill drew up and stood with bowed head, while Stuart and Velora passed through the gate and up the path to the monument bearing the sculptured baby angel.

There Stuart stood silently, while Velora placed the flowers on the mound and wept quietly for a while; then he lifted her gently and led her away back to the carriage. At the gate she turned and looked back, a long last look, as though with a presentiment that this was a final good-bye.

When they arrived home, it was nearly five o'clock and Velora barely had time to change to her traveling frock and get down to the station.

Velora's mother was bustling around giving instructions to Aunt Harriet about the household and attending to last minute details. She had taken full responsibility of the house since Velora's illness.

There were as yet very few motor cars and they used a brougham and a pair of

raven black Kentucky horses, which was considered rather smart at that time.

Uncle Bill was waiting patiently, holding the reins of the restless pair.

Finally they were on their way to the station. Old Aunt Harriet stood at the gate and watched the carriage disappear in the gathering twilight. There was something mighty like tears in her dusky eyes, as she wiped them with a corner of her apron. She had become very devoted to her young mistress during those two years in which she had known her as a bride and a mother.

V

Stuart unquestionably had a peculiar personality. Even as a youth he found it difficult to express in words or action his tenderness and sympathy for Velora, in private as well as in public.

He was rather reserved, although she appealed to his passion, which at intervals would break out impulsively.

Some sensitive natures show a peculiar dislike of expressing themselves. Stuart was one of them. It was difficult for him to express himself, even to the being dearest to him.

As he grew older, he submerged much of his impulsive passion into a sort of chaste sanctity, a trait which evidently he had inherited from his father.

When it came to the parting with Velora at the train he saw to the comforts of both his mother-in-law—to whom he was really grateful—and Velora. The compartment was properly ventilated; a box of chocolates and magazines; the luggage conveniently placed; but, when the moment arrived for saying all the tender farewells she expected him to say, he just could not do it.

He asked Velora to be sure and call on his uncle and aunt; to see his mother and father. Velora promised that she would, and bade him to take care of himself and if he should get lonely to send for her.

“All aboard!” . . .

Stuart grasped Mrs. Allen’s hand and, in his peculiarly cold manner, said: “I know you will take care of her!”

Then he kissed his wife in a rather matter-of-fact way and disappeared. He ran up to the window of their compartment and lifted his hat, just as the train began to drag itself noisely out of the station. . . .

Stuart, bareheaded, watched the train

until it disappeared into the distance. Then he turned and walked slowly back to the awaiting carriage. Was there a look of relief in his eyes? If it was so then he had not meant it to appear so. . . .

“Home, Uncle Bill,” he said, gazing wearily into the distance as he started alone on his journey to the empty house he called “Home.” . . .

Chapter 7

I

Ten days after Velora's departure a telegram arrived from Stuart's uncle. It read:

"We have suffered the greatest panic Wall Street has ever known. Place Carlton in charge of your office and come to New York at once."

Two days later, Henry G. Slader met his nephew at the Pennsylvania station.

Stuart was really shocked when he saw his uncle waiting at the entrance to receive him. His face looked white and old and drawn. The eyes which were always blazing with enthusiasm and interest through his thick glasses had lost their lustre.

The elasticity was gone from his figure; the firmness from his mouth; he looked like a man prematurely grown old. . . .

Stuart had seen his uncle only a year ago—when he had gone down South on an investigation tour. At that time he appeared, as always, a man in perfect health, in perfect mental and physical condition.

His eyes, bright and full of the flame of enthusiasm; his athletic figure, lithe and supple; his mouth and chin firm; his whole bearing suggesting a man of deeds: a man who lived with dignity, proud of his accomplishments and contented with life.

But the man who extended his hand to Stuart now was not the same person. He was a very grave and broken man; he stooped as though he were carrying an invisible weight on his broad shoulders.

Stuart had read about the scene in the Stock Exchange; how it had become a pit of horror, filled with a mad, seething mob; how great fortunes, which had taken life times to build up, had crumpled and fallen to pieces before the terrified eyes of the builders.

The newspapers blazed forth the news in letters of fire, how strong men had absolutely lost control of themselves; how some who had been in the midst of the panic and had seen their entire fortunes wiped out, had broken down completely and wept like children.

How others had turned white-haired over night and how, finally, it had been decided that the financiers of Wall Street should

meet the next evening at the Waldorf-Astoria to discuss ways and means to bring back some semblance of order to the great financial center; how they could repair the great shattered financial machine.

Stuart had read the glaring headlines and long articles in the newspapers, but with his usual stoicism, he had thought how sensational the American press can be: of course nothing could have been as bad as they had pictured it.

Until Stuart saw his uncle, the real tragedy of the situation had not dawned upon him. Even his uncle's voice was strained and unlike him, as he greeted Stuart.

"Glad to see you, old man," said Henry Slader, as he clasped his nephew's hand.

"For the first time in my life, I seem to have lost my grip, my boy: of course it is only temporary, but I do miss my old self-reliance, and I feel that I need a comrade to fight by my side. You have no idea what terrible days the last two have been!"

"I don't know yet just how I stand, but I know there is very little left, if anything at all."

Stuart tried to smile, but it was rather a painful attempt. Somehow he seemed to

reflect the gravity of his uncle, but he managed to say in quite a cheerful manner: "Don't worry, Governor, it will be rather fun to launch the ship once more with you at the helm and me at the oars. We are sure to bring it into the port of fortune with flying colors, and with your experience as a captain, it should be pretty clear sailing."

"You have, what I have lost, Stuart: the enthusiasm of youth!" His white careworn face brightened a bit.

"Perhaps you are right, only its hard to lose in a day, what it has taken thirty years of hard work to make."

II

It was Saturday afternoon when Stuart arrived in New York. As they drove uptown in his uncle's motor car, they discussed the business and the present situation.

After dinner, until long past midnight, with pad and pencil, the two men sat grave faced and stolid.

The next morning Stuart left New York to join his wife for the day at Atlantic City, promising his uncle to be on the job early Monday morning.

He had glad news to take to his wife. In

spite of the Wall Street disaster he felt that all would be well. His uncle had offered him a partnership in the firm; they were to begin business under the name of H. G. Slader & Company.

Stuart felt that the disaster had brought him good fortune, had given him his opportunity. He looked upon his uncle as an empire builder, he had always felt the most profound admiration and respect for him. The very height of his ambition had been to become a partner of his uncle, and now his dream had come true. The fact that his uncle had practically lost his fortune of over four million dollars did not seem to affect Stuart in the least.

His uncle had made most of that in twenty or thirty years without experience, influence, or the wisdom which comes with experience. Now he had something far greater than money, and something which no one could take from him: experience, wisdom, standing, and a great forceful brain.

Creation had pre-ordained him to be a Captain of Industry—a Commercial Power.

III

Velora was at the train to meet Stuart. He had sent her a long telegram of explanation.

She expected to meet a very doleful and depressed husband, but was surprised to find him quite undisturbed and with a peculiar glint in his shadowy brown eyes.

After their greeting she said, "Tell me the worst, Stuart, don't keep me in suspense. I have of course read the papers and it must be terrible!"

"It's an ill wind that doesn't blow some one good, dear," he replied, with a boyish smile, which had grown a bit sad during the past few months.

"Uncle will be able to save himself from bankruptcy with the assistance of friends. It will take some time to recuperate and pay up—but cheer up, my news is not at all bad."

"To begin with, we are not going back South. . . . Ah," he exclaimed, as he saw her face light up, "I knew that would please you! We shall not be able to live in New York right away, but we can live near enough, so that you can be in touch

with your friends. I know you dislike living down South away from them all."

"The best news I have is that uncle is taking me in as a partner. Its the one opportunity I have been hoping for. I am glad to have the day with you: there are a great many plans which we must discuss."

Velora had led the way to the bus from her hotel: they climbed in and were whirled away towards the beach.

Chapter 8

I

Eight months later the Blakes settled in a quiet unpretentious modern cottage in Upper Montclair, awaiting the coming event of the stork with much apprehension.

Mother Allen had gone back South to move the family belongings, and was able to coax the old colored servants to accompany her North.

Velora insisted upon having Aunt Harriet. "She was so kind and good to me before," said Velora, "I feel I could not get used to strangers around."

The cottage was comfortable and roomy. There was a garden and some fine old trees. Things were homey and cozy.

Old Uncle Bill and Aunt Harriet bustled about, making the house immaculate and in order.

Mrs. Allen had stayed with her daughter every moment she could; during the past eight months she had taken every precaution

for her health, but no matter how much she tried to cheer and comfort her Velora remained morbid.

She had developed an acute apprehension which expressed itself in weeping and doleful prophecies.

"I know I am going to die, mother," she wailed; "'why should I have to die when I am so young and I love life so?'"

"You are just wrought up and in an unnatural state," replied her mother; "for goodness sake, try and cheer up; I am afraid your constant morbidness will affect your child."

But there was no cheering Velora up. There were purple shadows about her eyes; her face looked haggard and distorted by the fear of months.

Stuart worked like mad all day in the city only to come home night after night to a weeping nervous wife. Yet he never lost patience, he was always kind and considerate; always gentle and sympathetic.

There was one who kept smiling in the home; it was mother Allen.

"Whatever would we do without you, mother?" said Stuart, "either I am more fortunate than the ordinary human being, or all

that rot about mothers-in-law being a hindrance and a nuisance is wrong."

"You have been most kind to me, as well as to Velora; I don't know how to repay you," said Mrs. Allen.

III

At dawn on the twentieth of April Miss Virginia Allen Blake arrived in this world, welcomed by a symphony of glad-throated feathered songsters, which offered a ringing greeting from every dew-hung bough in the old garden.

Velora got on much better than anyone expected, and the child seemed perfectly healthy and normal. A great thankfulness was in the heart of every member of the household; the ordeal was over and all was well.

Stuart was disappointed, because he was not presented with a son, but he felt a certain compensation, when he saw how much the little girl looked like him. She had his dark brown eyes and black hair.

He went to the office that morning with a lighter heart than he had carried in his bosom for a long time.

April, the month of showers, proved to

live up to its name. For a whole week after Virginia was born, there was hardly a glimpse of the sun. The earth and the sky were dark and chilled; the plants were bowed down; the clusters of lilacs hung heavily with their burden of sparkling rain-drops.

The birds called drearily from their wet nests under dripping boughs.

Each morning Stuart would tip-toe into Velora's room to say "good morning" and "good-bye," and each evening he came to greet her. He never forgot to bring her something he knew she was fond of, some hot-house grapes, some fresh strawberries, a book, or some flowers.

Velora would smile her thanks. "You are truly an ideal husband," she once said to him, "and I am a hopelessly spoiled wife."

"You are nothing of the sort," he replied, "you are really a very wonderful little mother!"

He looked down admiringly as she lay among the soft white draperies with the child at her breast, the pressure of the baby's lips, the clasp of its tiny hands.

"What a wonderful picture of Motherhood," thought Stuart, "what a pity, that

only through the valley of the shadow of Death, can the miracle be achieved." . . .

On the sixth day, he came in to present his usual evening greeting. He found Velora restless and impatient.

"How are you this evening?" he inquired, "you look a little tired, dear!"

"If it would only stop raining, I hate weeping skies," replied Velora; "I haven't seen sunshine in an age!"

"You shall have sunshine tomorrow," said Stuart, "I promise!"

The face that smiled up at him from the dainty lace and ribbon boudoir cap, was white as the lilies of the valley nestling in their cool sheaths of green leaves outside. The sallowness had gone, but there was no sign of the return of the roses to her cheeks.

Stuart looked at her rather gravely; "You seem to be recovering very slowly, dear! I think nursing the baby is sapping your strength. Suppose we ask the doctor if it isn't possible to bottle-feed the baby; she seems a strong healthy child."

"It might be possible," said Velora, "perhaps you are right; I will ask the doctor tomorrow."

IV

One May afternoon, a month later, Stuart came home early. It was Saturday and his mother and father had promised to drive over from Valley View to see their new grand-daughter.

He rushed upstairs the moment he arrived, as was his custom, but there was no one in the room. The house was strangely silent.

For a moment he stood in the middle of the room with a puzzled expression on his face. The back window was open and the white swiss curtains fluttered out in the warm May breeze. Through the window came the sound of voices and laughter.

Stuart walked over to the window and looked out. To his amazement he saw the whole family grouped out under an old apple tree in the back garden.

Velora was reclining among rose-colored cushions in a big wicker chair. Mrs. Allen was seated in a lawn swing with her sewing basket on the seat beside her; his mother held the baby in her arms; she laughed to it, played with it and blew kisses into its soft little neck, with absurd pleasure, while his

father stood over it dangling his watch chain before the baby's fascinated eyes, and Velora looked on smiling.

The last pink-tinted petals from the apple blossoms fluttered down about them, and the warm sunlight filtered through the branches.

Stuart rushed downstairs and out into the garden to join the group and to welcome his mother and father.

"The baby is the very image of you, Stuart," his mother said after the greeting. "I should say so, hair, eyes, everything, even to her tiny sharp nose."

Stuart smoothed his hair back with the palm of his hand, a custom of his when he was thoughtful.

"Yes," he said, "as long as it is a girl its too bad she couldn't look like her mother," he smiled over at Velora. "You know I couldn't exactly set myself up as a beauty, Dad! Oh well, maybe she will outgrow it: who knows?"

Though Stuart would not openly confess it, he really felt proud of the little girl's likeness to him. He looked down at the baby in its proud grand-mother's arms, who, though she was only a little more than a

month old, opened her big brown eyes, waved her chubby little fists in the air, and cooed at him.

The wind began to blow up a little chilly, and the family retired into the house.

Stuart brought the family Bible to his father: "You see, Dad, we have taken great care of your wedding present. I wish, you would write the record of Virginia's birth in the Good Book for us."

He turned to the page for the registration of births and offered his fountain pen to his father.

There was a mist gathered in the older man's eyes as he read on the top line:

'Henry Stuart Blake, Born March 10, 19..'

Underneath this record the Reverend Blake wrote:

'Virginia Allen Blake, Born April 20th, 19..'

Then his eyes ran thoughtfully over the lines ruled off below to receive the registration of later births.

He handed the book to Stuart: "You had better let me christen the young lady while I am here," he suggested.

“That’s a good idea, Dad. We will make arrangements immediately.”

And in the gloaming of the late afternoon, Velora stood next to Stuart, while Mrs. Allen held little Virginia in her arms and they listened to the solemn and beautiful reading of the christening ceremony.

PART TWO

NOTE: TWENTY YEARS AFTER THE
WEDDING OF STUART AND VELORA.
MEMORY'S MIRROR.

INTRODUCING THE MANSFIELDS.

Chapter I

I

On a perfect autumn day while the city was reeking with the din and roar of the daily grind, Mrs. Mansfield sat calmly on the broad piazza of her suburban home awaiting the return of her husband from the turmoil and noise of New York.

The Mansfield house was "forty-five minutes from Broadway," and located on the side of a wooded hill with a lawn which sloped gracefully down to a beautiful little lake in which was mirrored all the quiet loveliness of a charming American home.

Mrs. Mansfield was occupying her time, while waiting, by making up a list of names of friends to be invited to a dinner dance in celebration of her husband's birthday; a visiting list was lying on a wicker table by her side, and her daughter Marjory sat next to it addressing the invitations.

Marjory was eighteen, a modern Miss with rather a bored expression and, like most

modern young girls, a little blase, and while not at all unusual, yet quite attractive, though much more settled than her mother, who was a strong physical type and happier at forty than she had ever been in her life. She had managed to conserve her magnificent figure, and was still as vivacious and just as much in love with her husband as she had ever been.

The Mansfields seemed to be an extremely happy pair. Marvinna and Bruce were known to their friends as two particularly fortunate people; their happiness was to be envied.

They had a beautiful home. They were neither rich nor poor. Bruce was a partner in his firm—had just become a partner during the past year—and was doing a very comfortable business.

Bruce junior was in his third year at college, a fine, strapping chap, and so the egotism and natural pride which most every man has in reproducing his kind was gratified; as much to the joy of Marvinna as to that of her husband. They were indeed a happy family.

At intervals Marjory and her mother would stop in their work and chat, or gaze at the serene beauty of their surroundings.

Marvina kept one ear open for the sound of the car on the driveway, the first announcement of her husband's return.

It had always been Marvina's custom to meet Bruce each evening upon his return and always with a cheerful smile, a very easy thing when one is happy and contented: then an affectionate greeting—not a kiss—because Bruce had announced after their marriage that a man should not come out of a dirty train after a hard day in the city and kiss a beautiful woman. "Not until he has cleaned himself properly," he had said with his most engaging, boyish smile.

So after the greeting, Marvina would always go upstairs with Bruce and perch herself on the side of the bathtub, while he removed his soiled clothes in the adjoining room, donned his bathrobe and joined her.

During the process of dressing for dinner they always had their little chats about the day's doings.

II

Suddenly there came the shrill blast of a motor horn. Marvina sprang to her feet and taking the list from the table, hurried

in towards the door. "There's Dad," she called to Marjory as she retreated into the house, "we will finish tomorrow."

Marjory leisurely gathered up the envelopes and writing material, strolled into the house and up to her room to dress.

The children were always amused at the boy and girl behavior of their Mother and Dad, and there was a smile on Marjory's rather serious young face as her eyes followed her Mother out; it was more the enthusiasm displayed by her Mother about the coming birthday party than the way in which she rushed off to greet Dad, which caused the smile this time.

"Will they never stop having birthday parties like a couple of kids?" mused Marjory.

Marvina stopped just inside the living room to await the arrival of her husband, as the butler, a faithful old English servant who had followed his Master to America from London ten years ago, met him at the hall door.

The butler, true to tradition had stayed English, but the Master had become American; at least as American as a European can become, and so the following dialogue

floated through the heavy hangings to Marvinna who, by the way, was a staunch and thoroughbred American, having been born in Kentucky—a daughter of Kentuckians.

III

“Good evening Master.”

“Good night!” was the answer, in loud peevish tones, and then, “Damn these Yankee trains anyhow. Who in hell said there was a coal shortage? I will swear there is no coal shortage on the D. L. and W. No wonder they can’t get the men to church in this community. Hell has no terrors for us after two rides each day in those d--n hot boxes!”

“Sorry, Master,” replied the butler, as he started off with the brief case, hat and coat of the peevish head of the house.

“Don’t be sorry, DO SOMETHING!” Bruce shouted after the retreating butler.

“Thank you, Master. . . .”

At that moment he heard a merry laugh from the vicinity of the living room.

As he entered, Marvinna rushed up to his side and put her hand over his mouth as she cried, “Dear me, what a rush of profanity!

There, I know you are tired and worn and all that, but don't you say one word; just follow me."

And as Bruce struggled to mumble something through the hand which was clasped over his mouth, Marvinna dragged him out on the piazza with her free hand. Then she released her hold, and, with a sweeping gesture that might have been meant to include the whole universe, she said, "Look at that; isn't it worth anything when at the journey's end awaits a quiet home amid such grandeur? Smell the fresh sweetness of autumn, look how beautiful the sunset is mirrored in the lake; look at the red, green and gold of yonder hillside, and—she smiled up at him—suppose instead of having all this you should have to go home to one of those New York apartments in a big stone fortress, not unlike your office building, and live between four dead walls all your life."

During this speech, Bruce had been taking in deep breaths of fresh, pure air; he felt much better already. He had taken in the view pointed out by his wife, and nodded his approval as he smiled down into her face and put one arm about her waist.

Bruce was one of those boyish middle-aged men who could never be cross for more than five minutes at a time, or serious for more than ten. He was also blessed with a sense of humor which was continuously bubbling over like a spring.

"You are right dear, and it is worth anything to hear you talk like that. Do you know that you could make a fellow believe all those beautiful things whether they were there or not?"

So with half apology for his peevishness, he drew her to him and they entered the house and went up the stairs, arm in arm, for the usual chat in the bath-room.

The bath-room in question was located between Marvinna's bedroom and her husband's dressing room, so in the hall they parted and Marvinna entered her bedroom while Bruce went to his dressing room where the faithful servant was awaiting him with bathrobe and slippers.

Marvina powdered her nose and smoothed her hair while she waited for the usual confab in the bathroom.

IV

“Well what’s new, dear?”

This was Marvinna’s cue to perch on the edge of the bathtub as usual, which she did, and, to the accompaniment of the running water she answered, “Oh, nothing unusual. It has been a very calm, beautiful, uneventful day. Marjory and I have been writing the invitations for your birthday party.”

At this Bruce ducked his head into the basin of cold water, with the faucet still turned on full, a proceeding which always much amused and yet annoyed Marvinna, because she just had to chat after the day’s separation. She could never wait to hear the news of the office and the community train gossip, and to talk and listen above the noise of the running water always upset her somewhat.

Yet, Bruce always looked so funny when he extracted his face from the water that Marvinna could never suppress her laughter. But today she said: “Speaking of birthdays dear, I really believe these daily duckings you give your face into that cold water are accountable for it’s smooth-

ness and freedom from wrinkles; your face is as smooth and lineless as your son's."

"Yes," replied Bruce, coming up for air, with his eyes closed tightly, and making a noise like a porpoise coming to the surface spouting, "that's why I have kept up the treatment, and, incidentally"—he added in his usual boyish way—"it keeps the face clean." Then, feeling for a towel: "Nothing like pure cold water to bring the freshness and glow of youth to the skin."

"Tell me, whom have you invited to the party?" came a rather muffled and jerky inquiry from behind the towel, as Bruce dried his face and rubbed the skin into a warm glow.

"All the friends you like best," she replied, and, as he took the towel from his face, she handed him the list.

"There will be about thirty to dinner and about seventy-five will come in afterwards. By the way, I hope your partners will come as planned. Have they said anything about it recently?"

"Yes, I spoke to them today. Sheldon is coming, but Blake doesn't think he will be able to come. One of his kids is sick, his wife has had an attack of acute indiges-

tion, and he was feeling rotten himself to-day; dyspepsia and a headache. His wife is taking the children down to Virginia Hot Springs for a few weeks."

"That's too bad," mused Marvina: "you have been a partner since the New Year; this is October and I have not met any of the other members of your firm except Mr. Slader. I had hoped the Blakes would come.of course I want to meet Mr. Sheldon too, but then he is younger and a bachelor, and also new in the firm. I'll bet he is glad he is a bachelor, when he witnesses all the trials and troubles of the married men about him."

"Oh, I don't know," he replied, "I believe Blake is happily married. I have not met Mrs. Blake, but the picture of her on Blake's desk shows a beauty of the blue-eyed golden-haired type; very pretty woman," declared Bruce, putting the finishing stroke to the iron-grey hair at his temples, and, as he made an exit into his dressing room to get the clean shirt, collar and fresh tie laid out for him, he continued; "As for myself, I wouldn't be unmarried for the world, you know that, don't you dear?"

Coming back into the bath room after

donning the clean shirt, with his collar and tie in one hand, he lifted Marvinna's face with the other and kissed her lips. "Love me?" he said.

Marvina looked at him and smiled while he adjusted his collar buttons and tie, glancing in the mirror over the wash basin.

"You are just as full of blarney as ever Bruce! Just the same, it's good to hear nice things, and I believe there would be many more happy marriages if the husbands and wives would remember to say to each other every day; 'I love you.' I think most of us are likely to take too much for granted."

"Perhaps you are right, dear," said Bruce, as he gave his tie a final tug after much adjusting of the collar and facial contortion, "just the same, I can't imagine Blake doing any such thing; you will understand that when you meet him."

At this point he entered his dressing room and slipped into his coat and vest, having changed his trousers before donning his bathrobe. He was now fully dressed, looking spick and span and as fresh as though he had not had a busy day in Wall Street.

"You see," he continued, "there are many men who can do that sentimental stuff and get away with it, and others who would look like fools. I think Blake is one of the others; he is one of those cool-headed, practical-brained business men, who can be as crude as h--l."

"Here," Marvinna interrupted, "I say Bruce, you are becoming most terribly American, you are swearing like a trooper; I shall be obliged to call you to order. Please copy the good qualities of our American men, and avoid their bad habits!"

They both laughed.

"Sorry dear," Bruce said, "but its so expressive; you know, there is nothing in the world like it!"

Here Bruce took his glasses from the window sill, held them up to the light, took out his handkerchief and began to clean them as he continued; "But to get back to the subject of Blake. He is the salt of the earth; fine fellow when one gets to know him. Just the kind of a fellow every firm should have in order to be a success. You should see him sit on the money box when the rest of us get bloated up with big ideas about branching out. Cold business man,

not like the type of a man you admire, dear, though I think you will like Blake just the same."

"Too bad he is so much of a pessimist; likely to pour cold water over any flaming enthusiasm, and inclined to be a bit of a grouch, but there must be a cause for these faults, and once that cause is removed, maybe the faults will disappear."

"Your Mr. Blake as described by you seems rather unusual, and therefore I think he must be a character worth studying. He was not too cold and matter of fact to pick out a golden-haired beauty for his mate. I am sure I am going to find him interesting too," said Marvinna thoughtfully. "Is he going away with his family?"

"No, too busy just now, can't get away from the office," answered Bruce.

"Then perhaps he will come out anyway? The party is a week off; lots of chance to cure his dyspepsia and headache by that time."

Just then the first gong sounded for dinner.

"Good gracious," said Marvinna laughingly, "I haven't changed; I have been

chattering away and have forgotten all about dinner."

"Very well," replied Bruce, "I will stretch my legs with a walk along the lake front while you change. And as to Blake, I will do my best to get him out. I am rather curious to know what you think of him."

Bruce adjusted his glasses, took a cigarette out of his case and departed, leaving his wife smiling after him.

Chapter 2

I

The day which made Bruce one year older arrived and brought his new business associates on their first visit to 'Awari.'

As usual Marvinna was waiting in the big living room, this time accompanied by Marjory.

The afternoon had been a bit chilly and a few hickory logs were blazing and crackling in the fire place, which gave the cozy room even a more homey hospitable appearance than usual.

There was the sound of the limousine on the driveway; Martin hurried to the door. Masculine voices were heard in the hall and the hangings were thrown aside to admit "the Master of 'Awari' " and his guests.

After the usual introductions and greetings, Marvinna addressing both Mr. Sheldon and Mr. Blake, said with her usual gracious smile: "It is so very good of you gentlemen to come all the way out here in the wilds to

help us cheer Bruce on his birthday. He was very much afraid you were going to disappoint us, Mr. Blake."

"Not I," answered Blake. "Beautiful place; the wilds seem to have been pretty well done away with. My old home is just a short distance from here; I did not realize it until we stepped off the train, and then as we motored along, I recognized some old familiar landmarks."

"Really? That is interesting," replied Marvina, "and it will furnish such delightful dinner conversation; I will see that you are next to me, so that I may hear more about it. And now I am afraid I shall have to rush you boys up to your rooms to dress for dinner. We dine at seven."

"Early dinners and social affairs which end between eleven and twelve are more or less a necessity for our commuters," she continued, "because of their having to rise early to make the train which takes the business men to their office at a respectable hour. If by any chance the 'eight fifteen' be missed it would mean nothing short of disaster, as there are no other means of reaching the office before noon, except by

motoring down. At least that is the case at Oakdale.

She rang for the faithful servant and instructed him to show the gentlemen to their rooms.

At a quarter to seven, the hostess of 'Awari' was waiting in the comfortable living room, robed in a black velvet evening gown, with a bertha of old lace as its only decoration, to receive her guests.

A few moments later Marjory joined her mother, looking very sweet in a simple girlish dress of variegated golden shades blending in artistically with the decorations of autumn leaves and chrysanthemums.

Bruce with Mr. Sheldon and Mr. Blake came down just as the guests began to arrive, so that greetings and introductions occupied the time until dinner was announced. Mrs. Mansfield moved about introducing people to her house-guests.

The servant threw back the doors and announced dinner.

"Mrs. Radsley allow me to present Mr. Sheldon, your dinner partner," whispered Mrs. Mansfield, and left them to join Mr. Blake, who was standing nearby. She

slipped her arm through his and a procession formed slowly.

II

The lights glittered beyond; there was much light, but the soft mellow glow of candles only. The center of the long table was banked with a profusion of yellow chrysanthemums and autumn leaves.

When everyone was seated at the table and the first course served, Mr. Sheldon, who was seated near the host, rose and proposed a toast to Mr. Mansfield.

"Good for you, Sheldon; I like to be made a bit of fuss over; it rather compensates one for growing old, you know."

"Sorry it has to be drunk in home-made wine, Mr. Sheldon; you see, when the prohibition clouds began to gather, our more fortunate brothers of wealth stocked their cellars, but all we could do was to plant a vineyard. . . . However it's not so bad," said Marvinna, lifting her glass and inspecting the ruddy glow of its contents.

"Many happy returns of the day, dear," she said in a sweet gentle voice which expressed more by its tone than the mere uttered words.

After the guests had joined in drinking the health of the host, the usual buzz of conversation began.

The bachelor partner proved to be very entertaining and started the merriment with a good story. "Apropos of your home made wine, and the fact that you are from Kentucky, Mrs. Mansfield, I think you will enjoy my pet darkey story."

Mr. Sheldon had a peculiar drawl that was rather pleasing, and without waiting for a response he went on with his story.

"An old negro man was brought before the judge down in one of those old Kentucky mountain towns one day not so long ago. "What's your name?" inquired the judge. "Ma name am Joshaway yo' honor," replied the old negro. "Joshua," said the judge, "are you that Joshua who made the sun rise?" "No suh, yo' honor, I's dat Joshaway what makes de moonshine!"

Such a story is sure to make a hit in these rather wet 'prohibition' days, so every one laughed and began chatting pleasantly with each other.

During all this, Marvina had been studying Blake out of the corner of her eye without seeming to do so. She had noticed

that the story of Joshua had only caused a rather painful smile to enlighten his face, and then the not exactly bored but rather disinterested expression which he had assumed since entering the dining room, again settled over his countenance.

Marvina turned to him now, and as the old retired admiral seated on her right was busily engaged in relating his experiences in the late war to the fair lady next to him, Marvina for the first time, was able to give her undivided attention to Blake.

"Mr. Blake," she said in her most frank open manner, "my husband tells me that you are a very serious quiet man, and that you don't approve of frivolity. I hope all our silly worldly chatter doesn't bore you!"

At this Blake looked up at her, or rather through her, for he had eyes that looked through the exterior down into the depth of the soul.

"Thank the Lord," thought Marvina as she met the steady gaze of those piercing brown eyes, "that my soul is lily white—apart from loving the flesh pots and the devil a bit too much at times—because if there were a crime hidden there, this man would see it just as plainly as he can see the streak

of gray in my hair and the color of my eyes!"

While these thoughts were going through Marvinna's mind, Blake was saying, "Indeed, I am far from being bored, Mrs. Mansfield; besides you must not put too much confidence in what that husband of yours says. When he speaks of you, he generally uses somewhat the same terms."

Marvina was rather taken back at the reply as regards herself. Did he think her frivolous? However she hastened to reply, "I always form my own personal opinion of a character, and I try never to form that opinion too hastily. By the way, I am anxious to know more about your old home. What is the name of the place?"

"Valley View; it can't be far from here. I used to ride over here on my bicycle when I was a kid. About a half an hour ride on a bicycle, if I remember rightly."

"Valley View? Why that is only ten minutes motor ride from here. The development company has just put a road through the wood down past the Valley View Golf Club. I have always thought it a quaint old place!"

III

While chatting, Marvinna had a chance to discover just what Blake looked like. As she studied his features, she tried to think of all the faces of great business men whose pictures she had seen in magazines. Did he resemble any of them? No, he did not!

Marvina answered this question in her own mind, and then she tried to think of someone he might resemble. She remembered hearing her father speaking of James J. Hill, the great railroad builder.

“One of the engineers who had taken him on a trip over the road was asked what the president looked like. The man scratched his head and explained, “Well it’s just like this—he looks like Jesus; only he is heavier set!”

Marvina smiled as she remembered. “Well,” she thought, “it would not be near so easy to explain what Mr. Blake looks like, though he is a much humbler personage than the great railroad man.”

It is strange how quickly thoughts can flit through one’s mind.

Marvina had thought all this, while Blake had been saying, “Yes, it is a quaint old

place, and tucked away in remote corners in the hills near there are some very picturesque spots."

At this point the lady on his left joined the conversation, and Marvina had a chance to continue her character study. Those brown penetrating eyes and that long pointed nose go with the face of analyst. He would make a better judge or teacher than a business man; however, it often happens that we get tucked into the wrong pigeon hole of Life, and still we find that we fit fairly well in spite of the mistake.

This man had the eyes and nose of Erasmus, who as everybody knows, was the great thinker and teacher of his time, but all these two men had in common was dyspepsia, as far as Marvina had discovered up to the present. She noticed Blake had a broad high forehead: "Good brain," thought Marvina. Thin straight lips: "determination;" a rather prominent pointed chin, dark hair slightly wavy, and skin that gave the impression of being permanently sun tanned.

After exchanging a few words with the lady who had addressed him, he turned to resume his conversation with Marvina.

"Do you know Mrs. Mansfield, it is re-

markable how beautiful this place has been made in such a short time.

“Oakdale, huh—well it was not a dale when I used to cycle over here; it was called ‘Hades Swamp,’ and that it what it was; a swamp, and it had the name of being inhabited by the largest and greatest variety of snakes in the whole State.”

“Yes,” replied Marvina, “so I have heard; isn’t it a wonderful romance? The Romance of Progress I would call it. Why, it is only eight months ago that the entire stretch of land across the Boulevard was a dense wilderness! One morning I looked from my window and there was a huge monster of a machine, tearing its way through the wilderness, puffing and blowing as though it were demanding that all things make way for the great wheel of progress, which seems to be turned ever onward by some great compelling force. I stood fascinated, breathless. Now there are a network of splendid roads, and see, already there are twinkling lights from modern homes, sending out their beacons through the gorgeous old oak trees!”

Slowly Blake lost the uninterested, half bored expression and became attentive, and

Marvina could not help thinking that it had now come her turn to be studied. Her eyes were sparkling with enthusiasm as she finished the sentence and waited for the response.

"You should be a great help to your husband in his business as well as in his home," said Blake.

Marvina again was rather taken back by this; it seemed to have no connection with the topic of the conversation. But she was getting used to these unexpected answers, so she said: "What makes you think that, Mr. Blake? I have absolutely no business ability: I am an enthusiast, and a dreamer, who is forced by necessity to be practical, and—to my way of thinking—such a person is more or less useless!"

"I am sorry to disagree with you. I think that the first four essentials to any kind of success are 'brains, vision, enthusiasm and inspiration.' The first two a man has to be born with, the second two—almost as important—he usually gets from some one else. You are the embodiment of inspiration, Mrs. Mansfield, and you radiate enthusiasm!"

"An analyst, a thinker and a sentiment-

alist," mused Marvinna, "how interesting. ."

"It is very nice of you to say that, and I hope what you say is true. To be an inspiration to my husband would be a source of great joy to me, I assure you! But tell me, Mr. Blake, how long ago has it been since you deserted these New Jersey hills for the great Metropolis?"

"About twenty years ago I should say."

"And haven't you been back to visit since?"

"No, strange to say, I have not: you see I have been a very busy man. I was just a country boy, and I was obliged to make my own way."

IV

Marvina looked out through the big French window and saw a great silver path across the lake made by the full moon. On the impulse of the moment she turned to Blake, and said: "Would you like to get a glimpse of your old home by moonlight? If so, we can slip away unobserved, and I can motor over there; we can be back before we are missed!"

She saw a sort of clouded happiness steal over his face, as though a rush of pleasant

memories were battering down the barrier of years and entering his mind at the prospect of again visiting his old home.

"That is very thoughtful of you," he replied, "but really, I could not think of troubling you."

"Trouble!" said Marvina, "not at all; it's a pleasure; may be a little unconventional; but I never care much about convention, as long as one is sincere and loyal to decencies."

"Now, we will have finished dinner in a few minutes, the guests will go up to the Oriental room on the top floor where coffee and cigarettes are enjoyed while these rooms are thrown into one for dancing," she whispered. "You stay behind, and I will meet you at the entrance gate as soon as I can get away."

Blake actually laughed! A short low laugh with very little mirth, but nevertheless he had laughed, and with an exaggerated air of secrecy he whispered, "The plot thickens."

Marvina, catching the jest, laughed back and said, "Don't fail me."

The dinner came to an end. Marvina rose, took Blake by the arm, and Bruce escorted the lady next to him up to the

Oriental room. The other guests followed; all except Marvinna and Blake, who lagged behind like children up to some mischief.

When the last guest had disappeared, and the laughter and chatter floated dimly down from the room above, Marvinna said, "Your coat was left in the hall cloak room; you can get it and wait for me out at the gate; I will get a wrap and I shan't be a moment!"

Five minutes later Marvinna was driving through the *porte cochere* as quietly as she could, when Marjory threw open the front door and stared at her mother in amazement. Marvinna knew that an explanation was inevitable, so she threw out the clutch and turned off the engine.

"Mother, where ever are you running off to like this?"

"For goodness sake, child, don't stare at me as though I had suddenly gone mad. Youth nowadays surely does take itself seriously. I am only going to run over to Valley View to give Mr. Blake a glimpse of his old home."

"But, mother, suppose they miss you? The after-dinner guests will be arriving soon."

"Please, Marjory, I protest! I simply won't

have you bossing me this way! Will you tell Dad if he misses me? The after-dinner guests will not be arriving for more than half an hour, and I will be back in twenty minutes."

She turned on the power, threw in the clutch, and the car leaped forward, leaving Marjory standing helplessly staring after the disappearing, gleaming tail light.

V

At the entrance gate Blake was sitting on one of the lower elevations of the stone wall smoking a cigar and apparently studying the name roughly carved in the unpolished field stone gatepost. The bright moonlight made each letter stand out clearly.

He came forward as Marvina drove up, opened the door and sprang to the seat by her.

"Strange name you have given your home, Mrs. Mansfield, 'Awari' sounds Indian."

"Yes," replied Marvina, "It is Indian; I have about one quarter Indian blood in my veins, and I am very much interested in their history, language, music and traditions.

The word 'Awari' is Indian for 'My Heart's Desire.' It had been the earnest desire of Bruce and myself to have a home in some quiet place by the water: not restless rolling waves, dashing madly on the shore, but quiet water like the beautiful lake over there slumbering in the moonlight."

"So when we got our home here; we thought we at last had our hearts' desire, and that is what we call our home, though very few people know the meaning of Awari."

"That is a most unusual name, and certainly appropriate; shows individuality, and individuality is a splendid thing to possess."

"Yes, I think that too," replied Marvina.

They were now speeding along through the quiet country and they might have been a thousand miles from New York, as far as quiet rural scenery goes. There was not a sound except the croak of the belated frog now and then, or the night call of some distant bird.

Up to now it had been rather difficult to get much conversation out of Mr. Blake. He certainly was very quiet and non-committal. He appeared to Marvina like a man hiding behind an unpenetrable mask; not for any real reason, except that he did not

care to have the general public too close to him. He did not want people whom he was not interested in to penetrate into his inner-being; to become acquainted with his real self.

But out in the great silence of this quiet night soon the mask began to fall away; the silent man began to chat pleasantly and Marvinna was glad, because she felt that she was about to be admitted to that forbidden shrine—the real self.

“Do you know, Mrs. Mansfield, according to my way of thinking, in individuality lies Life’s greatest charm, and through its medium a person’s character is easily read; the kind of clothes a man wears; the house he builds for his family; the furniture he places therein; all these things are an index to the character of him who lives therein, and those who love to dwell in quiet places among natural beauty, are usually people whose characters are built on a solid foundation: lovers of the artificial are usually the fickle-minded and superficial.”

Marvinna had been wrapped in profound attention. “I am very glad to hear you say that, Mr. Blake; it seems so good to have one’s own ideas confirmed by one whose

judgment we respect. From what you have just said, I take it that you do not live in New York from choice."

"No," replied Blake; "I married a city girl, and when we were first married we spent two years in the South; after that I was obliged to take her out to the country to live; so that she had three years of trees for company and declared herself permanently tired of them. Indeed I am sure if it were possible Mrs. Blake would live on top of the Times Building."

"Oh well, we can't all be alike," said Marvinna, "but we who find sweet companionship in the trees and flowers, and can commune with nature, are indeed fortunate."

Just here they were approaching a modern stone bridge over a rushing river.

"Suppose we slow down a bit here," said Blake, "we are about a mile from the village; that bridge was only a ramshackle board structure when I lived here. Our place begins just on the other side of the bridge."

Marvinna slowed down the car to its slowest pace and they rolled over the magnificent white stone bridge. At the other end to the left was a big iron gate, flung open, and

stretching away from it, a beautiful lane which created curiosity, and seemed to invite inspection.

On the gatepost was a name in faded weather-beaten, worn letters. One could read the words "Broad Acres," though with difficulty.

On the opposite side of the road there stood an old-fashioned cottage, white, with a balcony and porch across the front. It had green shutters thrown wide open, and, it was enclosed by a white picket fence. On a tiny wooden sign, nailed to the gatepost, was the name "Willow Cottage" and the huge willows made a picturesque bower to shelter this quaint old-fashioned home.

"The entrance to our old home is through that iron gate: I see the new owners have not changed the name my grandfather gave it: 'Broad Acres.' "

They drove along slowly, and in a few minutes arrived at the village. Here Marvinna turned around and started back.

"It's too bad your time is so limited; you must bring Mrs. Blake and the children out to see us. Come out and stay a week, or, if Mrs. Blake can't stand it that long, then at least you can all come out for a week-end,

and you would have time to reminisce among the scenes of your childhood. I am just longing to go up that fascinating old lane with its lacework of oak branches for a canopy, with the blue skylight filtering through: it invites inspection; looks as though it might lead right on up to Heaven”

They were nearing the bridge again, and above the sound of the motor they heard a beautiful contralto voice. As they came nearer Blake said in a voice that betrayed emotion, “Would you mind stopping in front of the gate a moment?”

The voice was clearer now, and as Marvinna slowed down and ran close to the side of the road near the gate, the words of the song came plainly to their ears:

‘In the gloaming, oh, my darling!
Think not bitterly of me,
Though I passed away in silence,
Left you lonely, set you free.
For my heart was crushed with longing
What had been could never be.
It was best to leave you thus, dear,
Best for you and best for me.’

They both sat entranced at the heavenly

sweetness of that beautiful voice floating out to them in the moonlight.

Marvina turned to see whence it came, and through the cottage window she saw the mistress of 'Willow Cottage,' seated at the piano singing; singing apparently to her own soul. The soft light of the piano lamp by her side cast a gleam over her snow-white hair, like a halo; the face beneath the white hair, beautiful though mature, had no mark of age, and the light of a beautiful soul illuminated every feature.

Neither of them spoke; the beauty of it all inspired silence.

The field of "Broad Acres" sloped down to a winding river; they could see its waters sparkling in the moonlight, a herd of cows lazed by its side.

The last words of the song ended in a soft sobbing note, and then all was silent.

Still neither of them spoke. Marvina thought Blake gazed a little longingly at the white-haired vision of loveliness, but he managed to keep his face turned so that she was unable to see its expression.

Marvina started the car, and as they slowly moved away the singer began another song, and through the silence the

words so full of tender meaning reached their hearts: . . .

'Once in the dear dead days beyond recall,
When on the world the mists began to fall,
Out of the dreams that rose in happy throng
Low to our hearts it sang an old sweet song,
And in the dusk where fell the firelight
gleam
Softly it wove itself into our dream.'

Almost without realizing it, Marvina had stopped the car again to listen.

'Just a song at twilight when the lights are
low,
And the flickering shadows softly come and
go,
Though the heart be weary, sad the day and
long
Still to us at twilight comes Love's old song,
Comes Love's old sweet song!'

Marvina had started the car once more, and the last words of the refrain reached them dimly through the distance like a half-forgotten dream.

VI

Marvina waited for Blake to speak until the silence grew oppressive, and it was she who spoke first.

“What a beautiful voice that was! Did you know the lady, Mr. Blake?”

Mr. Blake answered with the air of a man who had been forced to awake from very pleasant dreams, but was making an effort to use his brisk matter-of-fact voice.

“Oh yes, that is Miss Mary Langford; we went to school together! She was a pretty little thing, but very serious and rather saintly; in fact much too saintly, if that is possible. At school her nick-name was Saint Mary! When she graduated she took up music and became the village music teacher. Its too bad we did not have time to stop in to see Mary!”

“Yes it is,” replied Marvina, “but when Miss Langford’s song interrupted us, I was asking you to give us the pleasure of a more extensive visit, and do you know, Sir, you have not answered me yet?”

“That’s so,” said Blake, “I won’t know what Mrs. Blake’s plans are until she returns from Virginia Hot Springs, but I personally have nothing to do next week-end so if you will be good enough to allow me to come home with Mansfield next Saturday I shall be delighted.”

“That will be jolly,” replied Marvina,

"we shall expect you." And with much enthusiasm she said: "We will go for a stroll through Memory-land, the home of your childhood, and we shall have plenty of time to call on Miss Langford then."

"It is very good of you to be so interested, Mrs. Mansfield, I shall enjoy going over the old place and showing you the mysterious lane in which you were so interested. There is a haunted house up that lane; it is on the left about two hundred yards up; it sets back in a clump of old apple trees!"

"How delightful," said Marvina, "but is it really haunted?"

Marvina had an inkling, that this was just a little subterfuge to get the conversation turned from the subject of Mary.

"Well, it may not be really haunted, but as boys we were sure it was. We used to point out the holes in the old door and declare they were holes where the murderous shots had passed through! Of course, they were only worm holes, but children have marvelous imaginations."

Just then Marvina turned the car in at the entrance of "Awari." The driveway stretched out along the hillside which skirted the lake for several hundred feet. At a sudden curve

in the driveway there was an arch, covered with vines, through which could be seen a crude stone stairway which apparently led right down into the quiet waters of the lake.

As Marvinna slowed down for the curve, Blake said: "Would you think me very rude if I asked to be dropped here, Mrs. Mansfield? You see I so seldom get out in the open I would enjoy half hour's quiet down there by the lake side."

"Certainly," replied Marvinna, and she stopped the car in front of the archway.

"Old Luna is doing her work well tonight; just see those swans sailing up that path of moonlight. It is really too beautiful to be real!"

"Seldom have I viewed a more beautiful scene: this is surely an ideal home, and Mansfield is a lucky dog," said Blake.

"I thank you very much indeed for the glimpse you gave me of my old home. After all, it is very much the same: not much changed with the years! About the only change I noticed was in Mary's hair; it used to be as black as a raven's wing."

Before Marvinna could answer, he had turned away and was descending the hillside by the rustic stone stairs to the water's edge.

Chapter 3

I

When Marvinna left Blake, she was obliged to bring her thoughts back to her own affairs, which she did with quite an effort.

Rushing into the house, she noticed that it was just five minutes to nine. Under the palms in the sun-parlor, the orchestra was tuning up and trying their instruments.

"Thank goodness they have arrived," Marvinna thought.

On her way upstairs she noticed that the servants had thrown the two rooms into one for dancing as instructed. The beautifully-carved, highly-polished dining table had been placed against the wall, leaving the center of the big room free. A huge silver punch-bowl glittered in a forest of chrysanthemums, the candle light gleaming on the silver and touching the crystal with all the colors of the rainbow. The rooms had been turned into a fairy bower of beautiful flowers and soft lights.

Marvinna assured herself that all was well.

She rang for the servant and sent word to the orchestra to begin the first selection—that wonderful exotic waltz from Hawaii, “Drowsy-Waters”

Then she threw off her cloak and rushed up to the Oriental room where she joined her husband. The strains of the first waltz came filtering faintly through the open door. The guests began to wind their way down in the direction whence the music came

“We must go down,” whispered Marvina, with her hand on her husband’s arm, “the after-dinner guests will be arriving; I think I hear a car on the driveway now!”

Bruce looked at her with an amused smile.

“Where have you been running off to, and with whom?” he asked. “Did you think I would not miss you?”

“Marjory told you, did she? I was sure you would miss me; I will tell you all about it later.”

They had reached the lower floor. Two or three couples were waltzing, and a few guests had just arrived, and had paused on the threshold, glancing around in search of the hostess. Marvina and Bruce came forward to greet them.

The guests now began to arrive very rapidly and soon the rooms were filled with a merry throng of the community people, ready for an evening's music, dancing and laughter.

The hospitality of "Awari" was well known in the community. Its mistress believed in happiness as a divine heritage.

"God never intended that we sulk in the shadow! We would be much better men and women if we laughed and played a little more," she had said to her husband one evening, when, under protest he was preparing to accompany her out to dinner.

"I believe that a man who buries himself in his work with no thought of pleasure or reasonable relaxation, intent only on the duties of the daily grind, is a fool! He may leave an expensive tombstone to mark the hole he finally crawled into, but he never really lived all through those years he served as Mammon's slave."

Bruce had laughed; "Listen to our little philosopher! All right, dear, perhaps you are right; only it is so darned easy to get into a rut, and grow old and fossilized!"

An evening at "Awari" was welcomed by all. There was always refinement, with

just a touch of Bohemia in the atmosphere: cares and troubles of the work-a-day seemed to pass away, and the people were able to give themselves up to the joy of living.

The gathering consisted of men and women to whom life had conferred talent and social instinct rather than vulgar display. The atmosphere was soothing; a land of subdued lights and soft shadows; good refreshments: quiet, perfect service, not forgetting something in the flowing bowl of good vintage and familiar flavor. A gentle reminder of what "prohibition" might have been.

There were always well groomed people, good music, smiling faces, and conversation not made up of empty platitudes. Everything and everybody typified that real refinement and latent gentility which accompany the practice and observance of the quiet niceties of life.

Marvina was always a most thoughtful hostess. For those who had arrived at an age when dancing was rather a strenuous amusement she had arranged tables for bridge in the Oriental room, with most carefully selected prizes for the winners.

When everything was going smoothly, all

the guests had arrived and the dance was in full swing, Marvinna mounted two steps of the broad staircase and, turning, swept the merry throng with her eyes to assure herself that everyone was happy, and that there were no wall-flowers.

She saw Sheldon, the bachelor member of the firm, gliding down the room with one of the prettiest young matrons there. Then she glanced around in search of Blake; finally she saw him standing in the shadow of a French window which opened on to the piazza.

She studied his face for a moment. He had replaced the mask, the mask that expressed something between boredom and indifference.

"Poor man," thought Marvinna, "his soul has sleeping sickness! I thought it was dead until that ride in the moonlight!"

She wound her way toward him through a maze of pretty women with jeweled throats, shining hair and gleaming shoulders, while the men stood aside and bowed as she passed as though she had been a princess.

Blake looked up with that painful little smile as Marvinna approached.

"Shall I find you a charming dancing partner, or would you prefer to play bridge?" she asked, lifting her eyes to his with a smile which she hoped would be contagious.

After a moment's consideration Blake answered languidly: "I think I will play bridge: I haven't pep enough for these new foxtrots and tangoes."

"Very well," laughed Marvinna, "come along and I will introduce you to the bridge fiends!"

At the stairway a gentleman came forward to claim the hostess, "This is our one-step, Mrs. Mansfield."

"I had forgotten; so sorry," apologized Marvinna. "Have you met Mr. Blake, Mr. Lawson?"

As the gentlemen shook hands, Marvinna glance around in search of Bruce. He happened to be standing nearby, so she called to him and said: "Bruce dear, will you please take Mr. Blake up and introduce him to Mr. and Mrs. Laurence and Miss Ewel; they are going to play bridge."

She smiled after the two retreating men as she was whirled away by her partner into the throng of merry dancers.

II

When the last guest had departed, and the good-byes were all said, the tired hostess looked up into her husband's face and said:

"Oh dear, but I'm tired. However it's worth being tired to see so many happy faces, and to hear so many lovely things!"

Bruce put his arm about Marvinna's waist as they turned from the entrance to the hallway, through which the guests had taken their leave.

"It has been a wonderful evening, dear; but your parties are always enchanting; it's the charm of your personality." . . .

"Now, Bruce, that doesn't sound a bit like an old married man! Besides, it is not really I who make the success; it's because our friends are so charming; so responsive and appreciative."

They walked over to the divan near the immense fireplace where Marjory and Sheldon were seated. They were chatting away pleasantly and for the first time Marvinna noticed the absence of Blake.

"Why, where is Mr. Blake?" she inquired, looking first at her husband, then at

Sheldon: "Now that I think of it, I did not see him at supper."

"He has retired I expect," replied Sheldon. "Blake never eats late at night and he is rather careful about his hours!"

"You sit here for a moment dear, and I will have a look," said Bruce.

Marvina dropped down beside Marjory on the divan, and sighed softly; a tired happy little sigh, as she kicked off first one little black satin slipper then the other, while prim little Marjory gave her mother a look of decided disapproval.

"Please pardon my very unconventional behavior, Mr. Sheldon," said Marvina, "but I have such hurty feet, I can't stand it another minute."

"I am not at all surprised," replied Sheldon. "Please make yourself comfortable, Mrs. Mansfield. I have been watching you during the evening, and I have been wondering how on earth it is possible for one woman to have so much energy and vitality. It seemed to me that you managed to be everywhere looking after everybody at the same time. It has been a very happy even-

ing indeed. What a beautiful voice Mrs. Reed has!"

"Mrs. Reed? Oh yes, she sang 'Smilin' Through' . . . her voice is divine."

Just here Bruce entered, interrupting the conversation. "I found the poor fish in bed—all the lights out and shades up—enjoying the moonlight. I had no idea Blake was so fond of scenery," Bruce chuckled pleasantly. "He is figuring out how to get ahead of the other fellow in the Street tomorrow. . . . Speaking of moonlight, Sheldon, it's a wonderful night, shall we just take a smoke and a short constitutional in the garden before turning in?"

"Not a bad idea," replied Sheldon, "It certainly must be conducive to refreshing sleep to retire with one's lungs filled with this pure fresh air."

They all rose. "Good-night, Mrs. Mansfield, and I thank you for the happiest evening I have had for years."

"Just a moment, mother," said Marjory, "and I will fetch your bedroom comfies."

She said a hurried "good-night" to Sheldon, and started off with the little black slippers in the direction of her mother's room.

Marvina was left alone. . . . She

sat gazing thoughtfully into the fire . . . the last log flamed up as it broke in the center, sending up a shower of tiny sparks.

“Was the man, lying up there in the moonlight flooded room, just a human Wall Street machine? Was he only a symbol of the great army of human machinery which makes up the foundation of the world’s commerce?”

Marjory came down with her mother’s bedroom slippers. Slipping her feet into them, Marvina thanked Marjory and kissed her “good-night.” Then she pondered on.

. . .
“Is he puzzling out how to continue the everlasting struggle, as Bruce suggested?” Marvina did not think so. “He looked so tired; perhaps his old shell is so exhausted, that it permits his sleeping soul to wander at will.”

“Perhaps memory recalls other moonlight nights of youth and romance; maybe his mind is traveling wearily over the intervening years, and he is living again to-night through all the joyful days of boyhood.”

. . .
Under the restful influence of her thoughts Marvina leaned her head back on

the rose-colored velvet cushion. . . .
Pleasant thoughts are lulling and soothing
when one is tired.

When Bruce came in half an hour later
he found Marvinna in slumber-land: a happy
smile on the half-parted lips. . . .

Chapter 4

I

Stuart Blake was going out on Saturday to visit those scenes of his childhood—tomorrow. How near and yet how far away it seemed to this soul-sick man.

Through every hour of the cares and duties, rush and buzz of the office routine, was present that eager anticipation.

Saturday was a perfect autumn day; just cold enough to give the blood that healthy tingle and invite a tramp through the woods and sunlit fields.

Maryina met the three o'clock train to personally welcome the week-end guest. She motored up just as the train pulled in, and a stream of commuters began to pour forth from every exit and hurry toward their cars or taxis.

Bruce saw the car at the end of the long line of vehicles and led his guest toward it. The two men greeted Marvina most cordially.

"So nice of you to fetch us, dear," said

Bruce, who never forgot to be pleasingly courteous to his wife.

"I was anxious to drive the car myself," replied Marvinna; "I wanted to give Mr. Blake a better view of Oakdale; he saw so little of it the last time he was out here. I thought I would drive home by way of Hilltop avenue; one can almost see the New York skyline from there on a clear day like this, and every part of the residential park is visible from there."

"You have no idea with how much pleasure I have been looking forward to this little outing, Mrs. Mansfield," said Blake with his painful little smile; "this air is wonderful; I would like to spend my future vacations in a place like this; of course Mrs. Blake would not like it, its too quiet for her."

"We are so glad to have you with us again," replied Marvinna. "You must bring Mrs. Blake out to see us as soon as she returns; she may like it better than you think!"

In a few moments they were gliding along over familiar hills; they passed through a deep ravine and then climbed the lordly heights of Hilltop avenue. As they reached the highest point, Marvinna stopped the car,

turned off the power and was silent for a moment; then she turned and addressed the two men.

"Do you feel the restful influence of the quietness?" she said. "To me it is immensely soothing; listen, there is not a sound to be heard except the rustle of the leaves, and they seem to whisper a gentle welcome to tired hearts."

Bruce looked at his wife and smilingly said, partly in jest and partly seriously:

"My poetical princess, if you keep that up, you will make a sentimentalist even out of Blake."

Blake did not hear this; he had alighted and walked to the edge of a precipice: he was viewing the scene before him. He did not try to see the New York skyline which was dimly visible in the distance; his eyes were directed toward "Valley View," that glad, smiling valley with its silvery river winding its way to the sea. The hillsides and the glades were clad in robes of blazing glory . . . the great red oaks; the flaming maples and the sweet smelling pines of emerald green.

This careworn wanderer was standing on

the hilltop of life, looking down at the sun-kissed fields of his childhood.

Bruce and Marvina smiled knowingly at each other and waited. . . .

Presently Blake came back and climbed to his seat.

"Marvelous; perfectly wonderful," he said. "I had forgotten how beautiful this was, and all these beautiful homes with their magnificent gardens! Why, it has sprung up like magic."

"Yes," said Bruce, "we are very proud of it all. You should build yourself a home up here; we would like to have you for a neighbor."

But Blake shook his head, and with that painful little smile said: "No, Mrs. Blake would not like it."

II

Marvina threw off the brake without starting the engine, and the car went gliding noiselessly down the hillside. At the bottom of the hill she turned on the power and whirled around the bend to the Boulevard and through the gates of "Awari." As they rolled up under the *porte cochere* the faithful Martin appeared at the door to receive

the arrivals, and to attend the guest to his room, lay out his clothes, and look after his comforts.

Blake threw open his window and breathed in the cool autumn air, thrusting his head out for a sight of the beautiful lake which gently kissed the shore below, as it sparkled in the sunshine and reflected the heavenly blue of the sky.

A servant announced that tea was served in the sun parlor.

In a few minutes the family and guests had gathered in the cozy big room with its big picture windows overlooking the lake and the garden, with its little feathered songsters holding a concert among the profusion of autumn flowers and foliage.

After a pleasant half hour's chat over the teacups, Bruce announced:

"I am going to fish; I caught a beautiful bass yesterday right in front of the landing place. That makes the ninth one I have caught this season, and most of them were five pounders. Great life, Blake, when a fellow can go out and pull them in like that, while standing right on his own grounds."

"You can't put those fish stories over on

me, Mansfield," replied Blake, "you'll have to show me!"

"All right,, come along. . . ."

"No, Bruce dear," interrupted Marvina, "Mr. Blake came out purposely to go over to his old home, and its such an ideal afternoon, I think he would like to go now. . . ."

So it was planned that Marjory and her girl friend would go canoeing as they had previously arranged. Bruce was to take his beloved fishing rod and go forth with great expectations, and Marvina with Blake would motor over to "Valley View" and call on the silver-haired songster, Miss Langford. . . .

Chapter 5

I

In the brilliant sunshine of the late afternoon all the dear old rustic landmarks stood out clearly as Marvinna and Blake motored along the beautiful newly constructed sweep of road which led to his native village.

When they had come into view of that familiar panorama of rural loveliness, with all its rustic charm, known as "Valley View," Blake said to Marvinna, pointing to a little stream, half hidden by the undergrowth:

"I dreamt last night that I was a boy again, and that I was wading barefoot up that stream. I am not so sure that I care about it now, but it was great fun then. What is that strange fascination which childhood gives the merest commonplace; that strange immaculate fragrance which is a life-long memory?"

"I don't know; it is something we cannot put into words," replied Marvinna—very

much of a sentimentalist herself; "in my treasure chest of memories, the memories of my childhood are by far the brightest jewels!"

They were silent again as they moved slowly on. Suddenly Blake called out:

"There is Mrs. Newolds, where my mother has often taken me to visit, and where I always got those wonderful hot biscuits and wild honey. . . . And there" . . . His voice seemed to falter. . . .

They had arrived at the old-fashioned cottage, with its picket fence and old well with its oaken bucket. . . . In the corner of the garden was Mary Langford; the little Saint Mary with her soft silver hair tossed by the sunlit air; dressed in a simple jersey cloth frock of dark amethyst color, with an exquisite little collar of hand-made lace open at the throat.

Mary was gathering chrysanthemums; her arms were filled with the fragrant blossoms of white and purple. Just as she reached over a cluster of shrubbery to pick a particularly beautiful white bloom, Blake leaned over the gate and called:

"Hello, Mary!"

Mary's hand paused in its pursuit of the desired blossom, but only for a moment; then proceeded, gathered in the flower and reached for another. She had not noticed the car pull up at the gate and stop; the noise of the other cars passing had kept her from hearing, and as her back was towards the road, she had not observed anyone approaching. She had undoubtedly heard the greeting, because there had been that pause. She had heard that familiar greeting many times in her day-dreams during the past twenty years, and no doubt had thought that it could only be her imagination.

Marvina sat quietly in the car and looked on: this coming reunion, or at least meeting and greeting of old sweethearts after twenty years, was food for her romantic soul.

Blake hesitated a few moments and as Mary did not respond, he repeated his greeting—this time a little louder. Mary turned slowly around and faced the man leaning over the gate . . . then, without a word, she moved straight toward him. As she advanced over the smooth grass, she clung to her armful of flowers as though seeking a support—something to cling to. She came forward as in a dream, but with a

gentle grace and dignity such as one seldom sees: her face a most wonderful study of joy and delighted surprise as she put out her hand and gently touched his, not in greeting, but to assure herself that she had seen correctly, and then:

"Stuart," she breathed, "is it really you?"

"It is really I," he answered, extending his hand, "and it is refreshing to be here after all these years. The years, by the way, have been very kind to you!"

She lifted her great hazel eyes to his and seemed to study his face for a moment; then she said: "You have not changed so much in appearance, but you have changed; what the change is, I don't know . . . however, your voice remains the same. But tell me, how came you here? This is indeed a pleasant surprise."

"My partner lives over in the new residential park, 'Oakdale'; I am visiting him. Come and meet his wife!" He opened the gate and nodded toward the car.

II

The two women shook hands most cordially; they seemed to like each other at once.

"It is a fascinating country around here among these beautiful old hills and valleys," said Marvinna; "I take great pleasure in being able to bring Mr. Blake back to the scenes of his childhood! As a reward he has promised to show me all the fishing streams, swimming pools and ice lakes about the place, not forgetting the old colonial farm house and the gardener's haunted cottage."

"But that will take longer than one afternoon," replied Miss Langford.

"Oh, well, we have tomorrow, and the Mansfields have promised that I might become a sort of member of the family, and come out anytime—or as often as I like!"

"Surely," replied Marvinna, "and we hope to find you taking advantage of the invitation. Come, Miss Langford, won't you join us? We are going up to explore the old homestead. I hear the people who have bought it for a summer home are now sojourning at their chateau in France."

"Thank you so much! I would like to come along: if you will wait until I put my flowers in water and get a wrap," said Miss Langford; "I am so afraid of a frost tonight; I was trying to gather most of the flowers!"

Marvina agreed with a smiling nod. Blake opened the gate and Mary vanished through the cottage door.

Mary was tall and graceful; she had a beautifully molded breast; a waistline that was just a bit too tapering for the present day style; small feet and hands; but her principal beauty was her transparent rose-tinted skin, accentuated by that soft silvery hair and those great sad eyes, with the shadow of a smile lurking in their depth. Her greatest charm was her low musical voice.

She came back almost instantly, wearing a tight-fitting little sport hat of amethyst and gray wool, and a heavy gray sport coat.

Blake helped her into the back seat of the car and took the place beside her. Marvina started the motor and turned in through the big iron gate and up the oak canopied lane which led to the old homestead.

They passed along under the lacework of scarlet-tinted leaves, the flaming sun lighting up the sparkling brooks and fine old trees, and casting a thousand fantastic shadows in their path.

“Wonderful, wonderful,” breathed Blake, “how could I have stayed away so long?”

"If old Mother Fate had not taken you by the hand and led you back, I suppose you would have stayed away forever?" said Mary.

"Well, I give a vote of thanks to old Mother Fate," replied Blake; "its about time she showed me a bit of kind consideration," he continued a little bitterly.

Mary looked at him in silence. Was this the happy care-free boy she had known in childhood; the young man who had gone away twenty years ago—when he was twenty-one and she was nearly seventeen?

How well she remembered the last time she saw him. The personification of Youth and Manhood! Well and strong and self-reliant; ready to face the world with cheerful courage. Happy Stuart; ready always with a funny story or a joke . . . what a mixture he was then, of tenderness, common-sense, poetry and seriousness.

Was this silent man sitting by her side the same Stuart? This man who had forgotten how to laugh; who wore the mask of ambition, with those sharp features, as though they were engraved in steel; those coldly intelligent brown eyes; thin lips closed firmly like a vise. . . .

A flicker of memory flashed through her mind as they passed over the old familiar playgrounds of their youth. A vision of the Stuart she had loved with all her woman's heart; the man for whom she had worn a dagger through her heart all these years. . . .

She had loved him with the supreme emotion of the very essence of her soul: though her spirit was of the finer, higher sphere; though she loved music, the songs of the birds, the laughing bubbling brook and the sweet smelling woods, she had always been a woman of the flesh.

God had given her a Madonna face, a velvet voice and a gentle soul. These concealed that tortured inner longing for love; the love of this man whom all these years she had thought of in adoration. Her body had ached for the embrace of his arms; her lips had burned for the kiss of his mouth. . . . And there he sat, apparently as calm as the "Great Gawd Budd," and as cold as the snows on a mountain top which never melts, though they receive the first warm kiss of the sun.

What was going on under that hard cold mask?

And there sat Mary, also outwardly calm, her face more Madonna-like than ever, under its crown of silver hair. . . .

III

The lane turned sharply as it led to a higher elevation, and Marvinna had to shift into second gear quickly and use great skill in handling the big touring car to make the almost perpendicular hill.

Mary and Stuart had been chatting about things they were NOT thinking about, in order to conceal their real thoughts, and choke back the emotion which was almost impossible to control.

Suddenly there appeared through the trees a little low cottage in the midst of a dead orchard; the trees stretched their long bare gray limbs skyward like the bleached skeletons of long unburied bodies.

The first glimpse of the little brown weather-beaten cottage with its hollow glass-less windows, like vacant eye sockets, produced an unsufferable sense of gloom.

"The haunted house still stands I see," said Blake, as he pointed out the cottage clinging to the hillside among its decayed trees.

"Tell me, Mary, is it still haunted?"

"So they say," replied Mary, "the story is so sad and weird, I always shudder when I think of it."

Marvina felt the thrill of that half-pleasurable, half-fear sensation, that comes to us even in viewing the most desolate or terrible, because of the poetic, the sentiment. The greater the tragedy, the more human interest it seems to inspire.

"May we stop and go through it, and will you tell me the story " inquired Marvina "it looks so interesting."

"Certainly," replied Blake, "if you don't mind listening to weird things."

Marvina stopped the car and pulled on the emergency brake; Blake alighted and helped the ladies out of the car. Marvina suggested putting a stone under one of the back wheels, as the hill was steep and there was danger of the car slipping back.

Blake found two large stones and placed one under each back wheel and the party started towards the melancholy little house along a tiny winding path, almost overgrown with now faded goldenrod and wild vines.

As they walked up the path Blake began to relate the story of the little haunted house

IV

"I think I was about ten years old when the tragedy happened," he said. "Down in the village there lived a young Italian; his name was Silvio Maroncello. Silvio understood growing vineyards and handling products from the farm; he also was an expert dairyman, and when he asked my father for a position as foreman on the place, he was accepted at once."

"He had been with us about a year when he married a buxom girl from the village. The girl's mother kept a boarding-house in the village for the working class, and it was there that Silvio first met his wife. He was typical of his race and very musical; he always went whistling and singing about his work, as happy as the birds which sang in the trees above him. Sometimes he would whistle an air from an old Italian opera sometimes he would hum a popular song."

"He was tall and slight; his expression was animated and full of intelligence, and he spoke hurriedly and gesticulated excessively."

"I remember this particularly on one occasion when a lot of us boys were helping ourselves to some choice bunches of grapes and were discovered by Silvio; he had a way, when he got excited, of suddenly breaking in to a rapid flow of Italian, forgetting that he could not be understood, but we understood enough to take to our heels."

"Silvio loved deeply the little fair-haired nonentity whom he had brought here as his bride, and he expected and exacted the same love and devotion from her."

"My father had this little cottage built for them, and Silvio planted the orchard you see there, and the vineyard just beyond, which now lies in ruin also."

They had reached the cottage now and stood facing the doorway of the main entrance. The door was hanging by one rusty hinge, swaying slightly in the wind. There was an iciness, a sinking sickening feeling of the heart which overshadowed the whole party as they stood there amid the scene of that tragedy of humble life so many years ago.

Stuart continued his story: "Everything went well with the happy couple for the first two years. The little cottage was a humble

pretty picture of domestic bliss. But the Italian loves a family; he loves babies; they are people of large families, so when after two years they remained childless Silvio became changed, he grew irritable and indifferent. The brainless little village girl grew more miserable each day; she went to her mother for consolation, but her mother was too busy. Yet she went; first once a week and then twice a week, and finally every other day."

"There was a young Irishman boarding at her mother's house. He had laughing blue eyes and a sunny disposition and it was Madge to whom he gave all his sympathy. The girl did not mean to drift, but she was just a primitive little idiot, and sympathy was so sweet. . . . She longed to become a mother; she had not the faintest idea why this happiness had been denied her. She bitterly resented the fact that her husband blamed her, and though she had once loved Silvio she began to develop a slow hatred for him."

"The relationship between the young Irishman and the girl grew into a warm friendship, and then into something more."

"Silvio became a trifle suspicious, but as

there was no proof he became moody; sometimes stolid and silent; sometimes quarrelsome."

"There was a call to arms for the Spanish-American war. The young Irishman laughingly donned a uniform and gaily marched away."

"About six months later there arrived at this little cottage a little golden-haired girl with laughing blue eyes. The young mother madly clasped her treasure to her heart, and in her great joy she forgot to notice that it was not shared by her husband."

"The girl no longer paid frequent visits to her mother. The little one became the very heart and soul of her adoring mother. The child became more beautiful as it began to toddle about, but there was not one feature like Silvio; not one little characteristic of his displayed in the make-up of the child."

"Silvio grew more stolid and sullen; he said very little, he no longer sang and whistled as he worked."

V

"The child was nearly three years old and she was the embodiment of love; she seemed to have enough love in her little

heart and sunshine in her soul to light the world. Her mother called her Sunshine and she became known by that name to the people of the neighborhood. Little Sunshine loved the flowers, the birds and the animals; she had no fear, and had to be guarded from harmful things. She would throw her tiny arms about a stray dog and share her jam and bread with it."

"One day Silvio brought home a huge police dog. The muscles of its huge limbs showed through its silky brownish skin, and its eyes looked sullen and fierce. Madge was horror stricken at the sight of the huge monster."

"What on earth have you got that fierce looking beast for, Silvio? I shall be afraid to let Sunshine out of the house."

"Perfectly harmless," said Silvio in his usual manner; "besides I shall keep him tied up, except at night time. Someone has been prowling about here; I missed some pullets the other day and the fruit is disappearing. There will be nothing missing while Don is on guard."

"Just then little Sunshine came tripping out and when she saw the dog she clapped her hands in glee and ran towards him. Her

mother screamed and grabbed the child in her arms as the dog lunged forward with an ugly growl."

The party were seated on an old fallen oak tree; its whitened decayed stump stood by like a spectre.

"The dog was tied to this very tree," said Stuart. "But he was tied with a rope instead of being chained."

"The mother had succeeded in frightening the child sufficiently to keep her from going near the dog, but the child had a way of standing off and speaking to him in baby admiration, and sometimes holding her tiny arms out as though she could hardly resist petting him."

"Silvio brought raw beef to the dog every day, and Madge warned him that the dog would go mad if he continued to feed him so much meat."

" 'The beast is fierce now,' she said."

"Silvio heeded not, but continued the diet. One quiet evening, just at sunset the family were at supper, Madge had lighted the lamp and placed it on the table, though it was still light enough, but before they had finished supper it would be required."

"Little Sunshine sat in her high chair and

ate her supper, dropping part of it to her cat which always took its place beside Sunshine at each meal, knowing it would not be forgotten. Sunshine never forgot the animals; she threw crumbs to the birds, fed the squirrels which inhabited the great oak trees and though her Mother did not know it, she shared her food with Don. Although she did not dare to go up to him, she always took something out and threw it near enough so he could reach it; an attention which Don always received with an ugly growl."

"After Sunshine had finished her supper, she slipped down unceremoniously, as was her custom, and sat down in the doorway. Her Mother had not noticed that she had taken with her from the table a piece of bread and a slice of meat."

"All of a sudden there was the mad howl of a dog and the feeble scream of a child. The Mother sprang up from the table, grabbed an old revolver which lay dusty among an accumulation of things on an old desk. Her husband had given it to her when they were first married and had said; 'We live in rather an isolated spot here; its safer to have this around; sometimes I don't get in till late.' "

“It was loaded, but as far as she could remember it had never been fired. The nickel was slightly rusty.”

“What went through her frantic brain during the moment she grabbed the revolver and ran to the door God only knows. Upon reaching the door she saw the big dog apparently quite mad; his eyes like coals of fire, and his teeth buried deep in her baby’s throat, from which the blood was trickling like ruby drops.”

“Her frantic screams rent the twilight quietness: the neighbors a mile away declared they heard it plainly, and their blood froze in their veins.”

“The frantic Mother did not shoot from the doorway, she ran to the side of the dog and seeing an axe nearby where her husband had been breaking wood, she dropped the revolver; it fell in the little pool of blood on the ground; she grabbed the axe and with one blow mashed in the dog’s head. It died instantly, without even letting up the grip it held on the child’s throat.”

VI

At this point Stuart put his hand up to his eyes as if to shut out some horrible vision.

"I was the only eye witness to the tragedy," he said; "I was returning on my pony from the post office. I stared horrified for a moment, then raced madly home to tell my mother and father."

"The girl had died almost instantly; her wind pipe had been severed by the dog's teeth."

"The Mother put her hand on the child's heart; it was quite still; then she heard a fiendish laughand looked up. There in the doorway stood her husband laughing in fiendish glee and gesticulating . . . 'There's your damned love child,' he shrieked between his laughs; " the vendetta, the vendetta."

"She picked up the revolver besmeared with her baby's blood and fired. The man dropped and crumpled up dead. Then she turned the revolver and sent a bullet through her own heart."

"When the neighbors arrived they found three corpses and the dead dog with its teeth still clenched in the child's throat."

"Upon examining the rope, it was found to have been picked with a pin and gradually teased until it was nearly worn through just near the knot where it would never be no-

ticed; the dog had lunged forward and the rope had given way."

"It is claimed that ever since the tragedy a woman's frantic scream can be heard at the twilight hour; also the howl of a dog and the fiendish laugh of a man. There are people who will swear they have seen a woman light a lamp and place it on an invisible table and go out the door."

VII

At this point a neighbor's dog jumped a rabbit not ten yards from where the party were seated on the fallen tree: the dog suddenly let out an ungodly shrill yelp and rushed right over the old stump and past the weird-looking cottage in hot pursuit of a cotton tail.

It nearly scared the whole party into unconsciousness. Marvinna shrieked and nearly fell backwards, Mary turned quite pale and sat rooted to the spot, Stuart sprang to his feet and then they all laughed; a rather nervous silly laugh.

Marvina was the first to speak.

"Well, I suppose it is difficult for us to understand the workings of the Latin mind; we cold-blooded prosaic Americans, thank goodness, are more sensible; we would

simply get a divorce under such circumstances. . . . Much simpler and saner!"

They walked over and looked at the door hanging on one hinge. Blake pointed out some peculiar round holes made by the bore worms at first and then enlarged by decay.

"My boy chums were sure those holes were made by the murderous shot; fired at the victims, never stopping to think logically; of course the murder was done with a bullet from a revolver. They are buried right over there," and he pointed to some little mounds about fifty yards away.

The mounds were enclosed by a crude low stone wall and there was a cheap square grave stone that served to mark the resting place of all three. It stood near the old vineyard; the arbors had long since rotted away, and the vines still grew in wild confusion on the ground, and twined about the dead trees and bushes.

"No wonder you shudder to think of such a story, Miss Langford; I had no idea it was so terrible."

And making an effort to shake off the morbid depression caused by the story of the haunted house, and the melancholy surroundings, Marvin said: "Shall we seek a

more cheerful atmosphere?"

"That is a very good suggestion," said Mary, "my spirits feel all mildewed and moldy."

VIII

"The house is only a few hundred yards up the hill; it is concealed by the underbrush but you will be able to see it just around that little curve in the lane," said Blake.

"Perhaps you would like to ramble about over the old landmarks a bit, Mr. Blake," said Marvina; "if you prefer to walk, I will drive the car up to the house and wait for you there."

"If you don't mind I would like that," answered Blake: "Would you mind keeping me company, Mary?"

"Not at all," replied Mary, that delicate rose tint coming slowly back to her face. "Are you sure you won't be lonely, Mrs. Mansfield?"

"Never," said Marvina.

Just then the wind sprang up and whistled through the tree-tops, turning the leaves of a nearby poplar inside out until it looked like a shower of fluttering silver in the sunshine.

"I can never get lonely in the forest," said Marvinna, and she looked up and pointed to the silver poplars. "Isn't it beautiful? To me the music of that invisible thing we call 'Wind,' is the music of the Pipes of Pan; the rustle of the swaying branches are like fairies dancing to that music, and the bubbling brook and rushing streams like fairy laughter. How can one be lonely amid all this?"

She threw in the clutch and took off the brake: the car went slowly up the hill and out of sight, while Mary and Blake stood silently looking after her.

Blake broke the silence first.

"Strange combination—that woman; to hear her rattle off all that stuff about fairies and music of the winds, you would never think she was a good cook!"

Mary laughed a low musical laugh at the sudden twist Blake had given the poetic conversation.

"Is she a good cook? She doesn't sound like one; she has the soul of an artist."

"Well, some cooks are artists you know! The last time I was out here, Mrs. Mansfield had some trouble with her cook in the afternoon and sent her off, and in spite of that,

and the fact that she had a big party on, she cooked the dinner herself, was dressed to receive her guests, and did not look as though she had even seen a kitchen."

"That's most remarkable! Then you have been here before?" asked Mary. "May I ask if it was last Thursday evening?"

"Why yes, it was! The last time was the first time in this case. I did not know the Mansfields lived so near the old home. But how did you know it was last Thursday evening?"

"I didn't know," said Mary, "but for some reason you seemed very near me that evening. I remember I got out some old songs we used to sing together, and I played and sang them. Strange!" whispered Mary.

Stuart offered his arm to Mary as they started up the steep incline. He looked ahead at the red autumn sun flaming through the fine old forest which stretched away to meet the green meadows where a herd of Holsteins was grazing peacefully by an old familiar stream.

They were silent for a while until they came to a little foot path to the left, at the end of which could be seen a quaint old

rustic garden house at the foot of a little hill.

"Why, there's the old spring house; still standing, not changed a bit and the path is quite beaten as though it is frequently used . . . Let us walk up there, Mary. You remember, we used to go up there in the olden days?"

"There was an apple orchard on the hill-side back of the old spring house. Do you remember the big red apples that mellowed in the garret, and were brought down for the Christmas Festivities?"

"Yes," said Mary, "and I remember the day we were all gathering apples; you were up the tree, and your sister Gypsy and I were picking them up. Gypsy got tired and amused herself by walking along the stone wall, and you said that if she did not come on back and help to pick up the apples, you would knock her off the wall."

"Yes, I remember," Stuart replied, with that painful little smile as memory brightened over the past. "She dared me to hit her, and I threw a big hard apple at her and she went down like one of those 'Knock-the-baby-down' dummies at Coney Island and nearly scared the wits out of us. I didn't mean to hit her; I only meant to scare

her, but instead of that, it was I who got the scare."

"Yes, you hit her right between the eyes; I surely thought she was dead: then you came near drowning her by throwing water in her face.... Poor Gypsy, tell me how is she getting along?"

"Fine, thank you; she has three lovely children, two girls and a boy; married very well, and has a beautiful home in Connecticut."

Just then they reached the spring house, by its side was a huge beech tree, its branches spreading out over the spring forming a leafy bower to protect it and keep it cool. On its smooth white bark in clear raised letters intermingling they saw:

—SMTAURAYRT—

Unless one looked rather carefully one would not notice that between the letters of Stuart's name were the letters of Mary's—that the letters read alternately spelt "Stuart" and "Mary."

He had cut them one day when he was home on a holiday. He was a freshman at college, and thought that intermingling the letters was rather clever. How well he re-

membered. They had been gathering chestnuts, and had stopped at the spring for a drink and to rest a bit.

Little black haired Saint Mary had watched him in all her girlish admiration. The tree was only a sapling then and the letters very small; carved with a penknife that had been a Christmas present from Mary.

"Some things have changed," thought Blake.

The tree was about forty feet high and the letters had expanded with the growth of the tree until each letter stood out in bold relief as though it were a living accuser of his youthful disloyalty.

Stuart looked at the letters which he had forgotten until he was confronted with them; then he looked at Mary. She dropped her eyes and felt that if someone did not speak the silence would crush her.

IX

"This is a fascinating old spot," she whispered; "I often come here and sit quite alone and dream! Tell me, Stuart, what have you been doing with yourself all these years. Getting rich, I suppose."

“Trying to, Mary,” he replied, and as though unwilling to talk about himself he changed the subject rather abruptly.

“Shall we journey on up the hill? I am rather impatient to see what the old house looks like after all these years.”

“Surely,” said Mary, “there is a little foot path just beyond the spring which leads up to the rear of the house; its a short cut; shall we take it?”

“By all means,” replied Blake, “though I am afraid you will have to lead the way; I have forgotten, or perhaps the path is new.”

They disappeared up the hillside, gathering branches of bittersweet with its beautiful scarlet berries as they went.

Chapter 6

I

Suddenly through the great flaming oaks and golden maples appeared the old colonial house with its broad verandas and old fashioned green shutters.

“Why, the old house has been modernized, hasn’t it? There are telephone and electric wires running in; there is a slate roof instead of the moss-covered shingles which I remember; also there has been added broad balconies and a sun-parlor at each end of the house! It seems good to discover that instead of running down the old home has been so beautifully kept up and improved!”

“Yes,” replied Mary, “the Cordons who bought the place at your father’s death spent a fortune on it. The interior is very beautiful and very comfortable. They were only here in summer; because the franc was so cheap, they bought a chateau in France and I don’t believe they will ever come back to America to live.”

Stuart apparently was too absorbed to answer. The sight of the old familiar home held him as in a trance. Up there in the room at the west end of the old house he had first opened his eyes on a quiet peaceful world.

There was the doorway where his Mother had appeared to welcome him home from college at vacation time and holidays. He could almost see her standing there now, with her black silk dress over stiff petticoats, her arms outstretched to greet her boy.

There was the dormer window of the room in the attic where he kept his bat, his fishing rod, sling-shot, rifle and his ducking gun; those had been the joys of his prep-school days.

"Blessed be the mirror of memory!" thought Stuart. "Would life be worth living without it?"

These two people stood there in silent ecstasy, viewing the old familiar playground of their youth with all the bittersweet emotions it brought back to their minds.

Stuart pondered on silently, "take away the power to recall: deprive us of that ever present influence; the realization and solace

it gives;" he thought "What would life be like without our memories?"

"How often as boy or man, maid or matron, all humanity, turns to the mirror of memory, and looks longingly at the reflections of the past. "

Stuart saw faces in its unfathomable depth, true to expression, lacking only the power of speech. The absent to whom his heart cried a glad greeting! How they recalled the joys of other days, these creatures of his mind in reminiscent mood.

Love was the theme. How the mirror pulsates and glows; the soul awakens to new life; his lips burned once more with kisses long grown cold. kisses which once sufficed to set blood and brain on fire; his empty arms clasp their own to his throbbing heart again.

As he gazed he saw the Golden Butterfly, little Velora, with her golden hair as though the sun had kissed it and left its mellow light; the poise of her saucy little head; the witchery of her wonderful violet eyes, the soft touch of her hand and the very outline of her form; all there—loved and fondled and held close to his heart.

Stuart could see the faces of his mother,

father, sister and friends smiling at him! Through the haze of the years he reviewed the happiness and small ills of his childhood.

In clearer light were outlined in his memory the hopes and aspirations and deeds of a more recent past.

With an effort Stuart forced himself out of the reveries and turning to Mary, said:

"Did you see Mrs. Mansfield? I suppose we should join her and look about the old place together."

Mary turned her head away quickly as Stuart looked up, but not before he had seen a tear glisten for a moment in her eye and fall, like dew shaken from a rose.

He pretended not to see, but the reflection changed in memory's mirror with the sight of that glistening tear, an accusing conscience began to sear and burn; his soul shrank from the memory of that which it could not now mend. An icy hand clutched at the bleeding heart of the transgressor . . .

"But while Memory lacerates and stings, it is also Memory which softens and subdues, and invests the most heart-breaking grief with the Heaven-sent halo of an enshrined regret" thought Stuart as he tried to swallow the lump that rose in his throat.

II

Mary turned and waved her hand in the direction of the landing place down by the small lake in front of the house.

"There is Mrs. Mansfield," she said.

Stuart turned to see Mrs. Mansfield throwing sticks onto the water while a shepherd dog gleefully swam out to fetch them back to her.

Most men would have talked to cover the real emotions going on down deep in the heart. Not Stuart; there was nothing superficial about him, and just at this moment there seemed to be something big and fine in the silence.

As they joined Mrs. Mansfield down by the lake, she turned to greet them with her usual enthusiasm:

"See, I have found such an interesting friend! Isn't he a darling?" and she patted the dog's dripping head. For an answer it shook itself, thereby causing a regular shower from which they were all obliged to make their escape.

"This really is the most fascinating old place, Mr. Blake, and no one would suspect

its presence here; this little lake is like a hand-mirror to reflect its loveliness."

"It is a wonderful old place," replied Stuart, "and the Cordons have made some wonderful improvements; they have also enlarged the lake. I wonder why they have departed after all the trouble they took to fix it up?"

They were standing on the little rustic landing place looking out over the landscape with all its glorious autumn coloring reflected on the silvery bosom of the lake, the willows hanging in dreamy silence over its edge.

To Mary that was Memory's Mirror, that drowsy little lake. On its gentle bosom her heart had been broken twenty-one years ago. She could remember the very spot where the canoe had floated idly in the sunshine of that June afternoon. Stuart had dropped the paddle, and let the boat drift while he chatted about the future which was to be his and hers. She had listened with joy singing in her heart to all his hopes and aspirations.

"Next year is my last year in college," he was saying, "and I shall be glad; for a man to spend twenty years of his life just learn-

ing to get started seems to me a rotten waste of time!"

"But I am lucky, Mary: Uncle Henry is going to give me a splendid position. I shall have to go away of course: however, its an opportunity. He is constructing a railroad down South, and I shall be stationed somewhere in Tennessee, but that will be only temporary!"

He had looked longingly into her dreamy happy hazel eyes. He was not handsome, but he was sincere; he had the intangeable charm of youth and the making of a fine strong **personality**.

He had always found it difficult to put his emotions into words; he had never told her that he loved her, tho' there was no doubt in Mary's mind about that. She was sure her love was returned, and so when Stuart reached out, and put his hand over hers, and with that seriousness of youth and boyishness which accompanies that first glorious love of youth, had said:

"Mary, dear, its going to be very lonely down in Tennessee without you. We have been pals ever since I can remember." She raised her eyes to his, and in the tender June sunshine her face had been radiantly happy

as she waited for the words that never were spoken.

"Will you." but Stuart never finished the sentence, because just then his sister Gypsy had called from that very landing place where they now stood, and that call had changed Mary's whole life.

"Stuart," Gypsy called, "come in and take us out in the canoe."

Stuart looked up and the words froze on his lips. Mary's eyes followed his gaze and they both looked in admiration at the vision of loveliness before them.

Stuart picked up the paddle and sent the canoe flying through the water up to the little dock: he sprang up and gave his hand to Mary as he held the canoe to keep it from drifting away.

"Miss Allen,—Miss Langford, and my brother Stuart."

Miss Allen smiled most graciously as she acknowledged the introduction. She was indeed a vision of loveliness as she stood there on that June afternoon, her soft golden hair tossed by the summer breeze.

She was very slight and girlish: she could not have weighed more than ninety-five pounds; yet a perfect little Venus; as light

as thistle-down and as dainty as a peach blossom in her pale blue organdie dress which accentuated the violet of her eyes.

There they had stood twenty-one years ago, a symbol of the eternal triangle.

Velora Allen was a city girl; she was a bewitching elf; a winsome will-o'-the-wisp, whose ethereal form had been caught and fixed by the wand of modern magic. In its frame of golden hair, her face shone like a lily, her eyes sparkling like dew kissed violets in the spring sunshine; lips rosy ripe and moist with the dew of promised bliss.

God could not make a woman like that and then blame a man for loving her.

She wound her way through the maze of life bearing her crown of beauty with grace and charm, adding brilliancy as the passing years endowed her with ripened knowledge of her power to sway the will of those about her and move the hearts of men.

Velora was the poor daughter of a widowed mother. She was twenty-five, though she looked but seventeen. In the city she had many rivals, thousands of them—New York City has more feminine charm and wit than any other city in the world—but out here in the country with only poor little

Saint Mary as her rival her triumph was assured.

How could it be otherwise? What chance had poor little Saint Mary, with her beautiful soul invisible, in the presence of this vivacious violet-eyed city queen schooled in all the arts of coquetry?

Stuart thought he had never seen anything so beautiful in his life. He could hardly keep his eyes from her face.

"I had quite forgotten that you were expecting a guest, Gyp;" he said, "who fetched Miss Allen from the station?"

"I did," replied Gypsy, "you were no where to be seen, and it was nearly train time, so I was obliged to drive alone. Velora has come to spend a week with me if she can stand the rustic ruralness that long."

"Indeed I am sure I will enjoy every moment of it," replied Velora, looking at Stuart a little shyly; "What a dear little canoe, and what a beautiful lake!"

"Would you like to go canoeing, Miss Allen?" He glanced up at Mary whose presence he had almost forgotten for the moment: "I am afraid it won't carry us all!"

"Mary and I will take the row-boat," suggested Gypsy.

"Yes, of course," said Mary, as she took the rope from Stuart and held the canoe in place near the dock while they both got comfortably seated.

The next June Velora and Stuart were married. All this was what Mary saw in Memory's Mirror!

Poor little Mary! Her heart was breaking all over again as she stood there twenty-one years later, and watched the shadows of the long ago pass in review.

III

Through all her reflections and memories Mary could hear Stuart saying to Mrs. Mansfield:

"Very few people know how beautiful the Kittatiny Hills are. There are two more lakes; one a mile or so from the other, right beyond this one. My father supplied all the nearby towns with ice from those three lakes, selling only to the wholesale trade. He also supplied two of the nearby towns with milk."

"He graduated as a clergyman, and preached in the village church here for twenty years. He was a great old philosopher. You would have liked him, Mrs. Mansfield."

"Yes," said Mary, trying to bring herself back to the present, "Reverend Blake was a wonderful man. He was everybody's friend and everybody loved him. Though he was seventy-two when he died, he never really grew old; there was hardly a line in his face, and his heart was ever young."

"Well," Stuart remarked, "I remember the sermon I received from him when I left this old home, and started out to face the world and its struggles—Wish I were big enough to live up to it. . . ."

"Walk the path of life with hope in your heart and your head erect, my boy," said he, "without fear of the future or foolish appeal to the present. Keep conscience as a comrade; remember, work it its own recompense; accept fools with fortitude, and meanness without malice. (Self-forgetfulness and self-respect are great assets in life.) Remember always the relative values of money and manners; be obedient to the purpose of your creation, so that you may have the love of woman and the confidence and companionship of friends; do not judge others lest you condemn yourself."

"Close your eyes to the allurements of riches, your ears to the clamor of the multi-

tudes. Never be discourteous or unkind. If there is sorrow and suffering in store for you as, is the rule of life, have the courage to bear and the strength to endure, keeping in mind that others too have carried a cross, and if at the end you have not reached the castle of your dreams, may God be gracious in his mercy and give you the will to be content.”

“My Father practiced what he preached: would that I could have followed in his footsteps. He worked all week out in the open with his men; each Sunday found him preaching a wonderful philosophy of life in his village church; he was the happiest man I have ever known.”

“I am sure I should have liked your father, Mr. Blake,” said Marvina. “The things he said to you are even more beautiful than the Sermon on the Mount, and the man who spoke them could only have been a great personality.”

IV

Suddenly the dog which had been drying himself in the sunshine sprang up with a loud bark of welcome, and went bounding

off to greet some one who had just driven up in the barn yard.

An old colored man and woman alighted.

“Down Victuh, down, you wet rascal,” the old woman shouted as she came toward the visitors. When she was quite near she greeted Miss Langford.

“Well, how do, Miss Mary, how is yo’ today?” and she held out her hand in welcome. Then she spied Blake.

“Well, if dare ain’t Mistah Stuart! fo’ de Lawd’s sake, how-d’y do; whar have yo’ been akeepin’ yo’self all dese heah years? It sho’ is a long time ’go sence yo’ bring me an’ Bill up North wid yo’.”

“Yes, Aunt Harriet, it’s been about fifteen years since I came up here from Tennessee, and sent for you and Uncle Bill. I thought surely you would go back to your home after mother and father died. How is Uncle Bill?”

At that she turned and called, “Oh, Bill. come heah!”

There approached rather slowly what might have been a second edition of Uncle Tom. This old human relic of past ages was born in slavery, and had the quaint old-

fashioned manners of the servant of the best Southern families.

His good-natured old black face was shining like ebony under the whiteness of his hair. His greeting to Stuart was very courteous, and he beamed with delighted surprise as his eyes rested on the face of his old employer.

“Well how-d’ yo do; Mr. Stuart, I sho’ is glad to se yo’; so yo’ come back at las’ to see yoah old home?”

“Yes, Uncle Bill; I am here just by chance, but I am mighty glad of this opportunity to look around!”

The old negro greeted Mary, and bowed respectfully to Mrs. Mansfield.

“Spec yo’ all would like ter see de big house? Ef yo’ step this heah way, I jes get de keys an’ op’n de do! When Mistah Cordon buy de old place he jes take Harriet an’ me on, and we is lef’ heah ter take ceare of ebberthin’.”

Old Uncle Bill fumbled in his pockets, drew forth a big old-fashioned key, unlocked and opened the door, then stood back while the ladies entered, followed by Stuart.

Chapter 7

I

The sun was setting as Marvina, with her dainty feet pressed against the brake, glided down through the avenue of trees along the hillside homeward bound.

Stuart's old servants insisted upon loading the car with various products from the farm. A basket of big red apples, some black walnuts, a jug of cream, a bottle of sweet cider, and a large print of sweet butter.

The rays of the setting sun were flooding forest and meadow with golden light. The last peaceful beauty of the dying day surrounded the party as they chatted pleasantly about the events of the day.

Suddenly, a blood-curdling shriek filled the air. It frightened Marvina so she almost lost control of the car. Looking in the direction from which the sound came they found that they were passing the haunted cottage.

Mary automatically clutched Stuart's hand. There was dead silence no one

seemed able to speak; it was not until the car drew up in front of the little gate at Willow Cottage that the silence was broken.

It was Marvinna who spoke first.

"Here we are, Miss Langford. Dear me, I am shaking like a leaf. Did you hear what I heard?"

"Indeed we did, Mrs. Mansfield, wasn't it terrible?" replied Mary. Discovering that Stuart was still holding her hand she hastily drew it away and blushed prettily, which brought back the glow to her very pale frightened face.

"Do you really think it was a ghost, Mr. Blake? it sounded mighty real to me; it might be a hoax."

"It is difficult to know," replied Stuart, "we were past the place, and it was all over instantly, and I think we had forgotten about the place for the moment; I am sure I had. Still, there are mysteries and realities which are past all understanding.

"Well," said Marvinna, "Let's try and forget it as soon as possible. Whatever it was, it was horrible; let's return to more pleasant reflections!"

"Won't you come in and have a cup of tea to cheer you on your way?" said Mary.

"Thank you; I would love to, but it is so late I fear we will be obliged to keep dinner waiting as it is."

Marvina held out her hand and with a gracious smile said: "I hope, Miss Langford, that this is the beginning of a long and pleasant friendship!"

"I assure you that your wish is mutual, Mrs. Mansfield. Thank you very much for a very happy afternoon."

Stuart opened the gate and Mary entered, she turned and gave him her hand.

"It has been good to see you again, Stuart, and I hope you won't stay away so long again." She smiled up at him, a sweet-voiced old-fashioned girl.

As Stuart pressed her hand he said: "It's been a glorious day. I may ramble over this way in the morning; it isn't much of a walk. At any rate I feel that the future will bring me back very often to reminisce among these picturesque hills!"

Mary leaned on the garden gate and watched the car fade away into the twilight shadows; then she turned and slowly entered the house.

In her room she removed her cloak and hat, unlocked the drawer of an old desk and

took from it a package tied with a faded blue ribbon. They were old love letters. Each one read, until it had become quite limp.

There was a faded rose pressed together with some pansies and violets. An old tintype of Stuart and herself taken at a camp meeting at Mount Tabor years ago. She smiled a little sadly at the funny balloon sleeves and the choker of those days, and the swagger bright eyed youth at her side.

Could it be possible that this was the same Stuart who had left her a few moments ago? She pressed the picture to her lips . . . Then she picked up the envelope with the faded rose. How happy she had been when that rose had come to her with its flaming heart, in all its budding beauty.

Stuart had sent roses on Christmas morning; twenty-three years ago . . .

With them he had sent a verse from a very beautiful poem. She took the paper containing the verse from around the faded flowers and read it again, as she had done hundreds of times before.

“The thoughts I have of you each day,
Change bleak December into May;

My heart thrills with the summer's glow,
And roses blossom in the snow."

Mary put a match to the logs in the small fireplace, and crouching down on the hearth rug began to read again those cherished treasures of her only love in the glow of the log fire. A great tear would drop down on a beloved page from time to time, —a jewel from a heart of gold.

There was a knock on the door and Julia, the maid of all work, entered.

"Supper is all ready, Miss Mary, and your father is waiting in the dining room. Are you sick? Can I do anything for you?"

"No—no, thank you, Julia, I am quite all right; just a little headache, that's all. Please tell father that I will be down at once."

"Very well, ma'm, I'll make the tea."

As the maid closed the door Mary rose from her place by the fire, locked her treasures in their hiding place, bathed her face in cold water, and went downstairs to join her father in the dining room.

PART THREE

AND THEN . . .

Chapter I

I

From every window of "Awari" there blazed forth a welcoming light. It was Thanksgiving eve, and Thanksgiving with the Mansfields was always a jolly affair; it meant the gathering together of friends for a dinner and dancing. And such a dinnerthe old family cook had been brought up from Kentucky to reign over the kitchen.

Aunt Mandie was a cook of no small accomplishments; she had cooked for Marvin's mother for twenty years. A Thanksgiving dinner in Kentucky did not mean a course dinner very much like any other dinner in the North, with a turkey and cranberry sauce and mince pie. With the Kentuckians, a Thanksgiving dinner was a feast: it meant preparing two weeks ahead, and Aunt Mandie—looking for all the world as though she might have been the original Aunt Jemima of pan cake fame—had always filled big stone crocks with luscious mincemeat, made from choice and carefully

selected ingredients. The Virginia hams were never so good as when prepared by Aunt Mandie; she would scrub, boil and skin them, then bake them until they were a nut brown, constantly basting them with sweet wine; with this there would be a garnish of glazed sweet potatoes and not 'a turkey,' but young turkeys stuffed with chestnuts; chicken pies with crust as light as thistle down; sweet pickled peaches; preserved ginger; home made chow chow; white potatoes and cauliflower whipped to a creamy fluff with butter and sweet milk. There would be baked squash and creamed onions; beaten biscuit, and dozens of pies; pumpkin, lemon meringue and mince.

These were only a few of the luxuries of the feast; there were terrapins and oysters; home made jellies; frozen custards and many other delicacies, too numerous to mention.

Aunt Mandie always had two other robust colored women as assistants, and the task of preparing the feast was a source of keen delight to her.

Marvina fluttered about, giving directions here and there. The spicy odors which floated up from the kitchen every time the

door opened sufficed to make anyone hungry.

More than once Marvinna was reminded of her childhood as she ran down to the kitchen to see that all was well, only to be greeted invariably by Aunt Mandie's broad grin: "you go erlong honey, doan you trouble yo' head bout de dinner. I's gwine ter fix eberthing jes sames I use to fix fer yo' Ma!"

Marvinna's mother had been dead about three years. She smiled sadly now, as she was confronted with the ghosts of dead and gone Thanksgiving festivities, where her mother, a sweet voiced lady of the old-fashioned South, had moved about the old home like a gentle queen.

"Just came to see how you were getting on, Aunt Mandie; it makes me feel quite a child again to come down to the kitchen and find you here."

Assuring herself that all was well in the kitchen, Marvinna tripped back to the dining room to see that all was as it should be.

The center of the long banquet table was banked with golden glow and feathery autumn leaves. Marvinna was a thrifty housewife, as well as an excellent hostess:

she always fashioned all decorations herself, blending the color scheme to suit the seasons and occasions. The almond cups were concealed by miniature imitation turkeys, and the dinner favors were beautifully bound miniature histories of the first Thanksgiving, with hand painted illustrations. The silver candlesticks held tall tapering candles, the exact shade of the golden glow.

A profusion of the beautiful yellow flowers and autumn leaves filled large urns and vases in the drawing room, reception hall and solarium, until the house was a bower of golden blossoms. Under the palms in the spacious sun parlor was an electric fountain, filled with rose water; the delicate perfume filled the air like the fragrance from an old-fashioned garden.

Marvina's face beamed with a smile of satisfaction as she mounted the stairs to dress for dinner. On the top step she was confronted by her husband, immaculately groomed and looking half his age.

"I was just going to look for you, dear; I wonder, how you manage to be so fresh and charming at your parties always, when

you work up to the very last minute like this."

"What time is it, Bruce? Aren't you dressed early, dear?"

"Not so very," replied Bruce; "it is quarter of six; the Blakes will be here at six thirty. If you expect to be ready to receive them, you had better hurry! I thought I would take an airing for half an hour; a brisk walk along the lake front in the cool crisp air sharpens one's appetite!"

"Dear me! I always forget to watch the time; please be on hand to receive the Blakes if I can't make it, dear. I never dreamed it was so late!" She smiled at Bruce over her shoulder as she hurried into her room.

A half hour later, hearing Marjory open her door and start downstairs, Marvina called to her; "Marjory dear, if you are all dressed, will you come in and hook me up?" Marjory entered, looking very flowerlike in her orchid colored chiffon. She smiled at her mother struggling with her hair, while the straps of her evening gown had slipped down over her arms.

Marjory took a pin from the dressing table and pinned up her mother's unruly

locks. "Better let me hook your dress first, mother!"

Marvina straightened up and put her shoulders back to make the hooking easier. "Can I do anything more to help you, mother?" said Marjory when she had snapped the last hook in place.

"Yes, dear; please look the guest rooms over and see if all is as it should be. I am so afraid the new maid may have forgotten something; and then will you please see that only the shaded soft lights are on throughout the house? Thanks dear, I shall be down in a few minutes!"

Ten minutes later Marvina robed in a clinging grey *crepe meteor* shot with silver, clasped an old-fashioned amethyst necklace about her neck; she slipped on a dinner ring which matched her necklace, and as she smoothed the whisp of white hair into place over her forehead, and gave her nose a final pat, she heard the sound of a motor car on the driveway. Turning out all the lights except the rose-colored candelabras on her dressing table, she hurried downstairs and stood in the reception hall ready to receive her guests.

II

Martin ushered in Mr. and Mrs. Blake a moment later. "How do you do, Mrs. Mansfield? meet Mrs. Blake!"

"So good of you to come, Mrs. Blake; I hear you don't like the country, but I think you will find us quite jolly out here!"

"It is very good of you to ask us, Mrs. Mansfield, and from the smell of your dinner, I know I am going to love it here; the first whiff of it nearly starved me."

"Isn't it too bad that they don't build these modern houses odor-proof and sound-proof?" replied Marvina. "To save my life, I can't keep the odors of food entirely out, and the kitchen is in the basement too. I have a fountain of rose water splashing in the sun room and I am even burning incense, but the dominant fragrance seems to be the dinner at present!"

"Don't let that disturb you, Mrs. Mansfield; as far as Mrs. Blake is concerned she would rather inhale the fragrance of a good dinner than the perfume from a garden full of roses," ventured Stuart.

"Very well," said the hostess; "I shall hurry you right off to your rooms to dress

at once and there will be no delay. We dine at seven-thirty."

Marvina left the Blakes at the entrance to their rooms, pointing out the push button. "Please ring if you require anything; I hope you will be comfortable."

"This is lovely; I am sure we will be very comfortable Mrs. Mansfield!"

Marvina hurried back downstairs. She looked about for Bruce, and as he was not to be found in the house, she threw a woollen cape about her and went down in the garden by the lake. There she saw him sitting on a bench leisurely puffing a cigarette.

"Well, you are a nice one! You promised to return in time to receive the Blakes; it's a good thing I was ready!"

"My dear, I am so sorry; the night is so beautiful, and the atmosphere so quiet and soothing. I am hanged if I had not forgotten all about the Blakes; have they arrived?"

Marvina laughed good naturedly and sat down beside her husband. "Of course they have; and Bruce, did you say Mrs. Blake was a beautiful slender blonde?"

"I said 'the picture' on Blake's desk was of a beautiful little blonde," replied Bruce.

"Then you have never seen Mrs. Blake?"

"No," replied Bruce.

"Well, I really had quite a shock, dear. I expected to meet a little will-o'-the-wisp, and do you know, Mrs. Blake weighs at least two hundred pounds. She may have been willowy once, but she is immense now, and I should say, stupid as well, though very amiable! Poor woman! Her face is so fat, she can hardly get her eyes open: they must have been very beautiful eyes once . . . I mean, when she could open them wide. Her fingers are too fat; the kind one usually sees filled with rings, though she has only her wedding ring and a solitaire, and do you know, dear, the most pathetic thing about her, I think, is her appetite . . . Her little squeezed-in eyes just sparkled when she smelled the spicy odors from the kitchen, and she remarked about how good it smelled, the moment she entered the house."

"Poor old Stuart! poor old chap!" was Bruce's only answer; then he said: "it is blowing up rather chilly; you had better come along in, old dear." He drew the cape closer about her, put his arm around her waist, and as they strolled in he said;

"It seems your first impression is not very favorable; however, you may find some redeeming feature when you know her better. Blake is very devoted to his family, and seems to be a contented married man."

Bruce opened the door, and they both stepped in the pretty, cosey entrance hall, and stood looking admiringly across the softly-lighted, beautiful, flower-bedecked rooms.

"You have done it all so beautifully," whispered Bruce: "There is always a cosey homey, luxuriousness about this nest you have made."

Marvina smiled up at him; ("I could not have made it without your help, dear! Just like the birds that build outside in our trees, there are always two at work, the male and his mate.")

"Just the same, mother," Bruce said smilingly, ("it is the wife who makes the home, and it is the wife who makes us love the home!")

Just then there were footsteps heard on the stairs, and Bruce moved forward to greet Stuart. "Glad to see you, old man," he said, extending his hand; "you sure are a rapid dresser."

"Yes," replied Stuart, "we are lucky devils when it comes to dress; the ordinary dinner dress of a gentleman is not complicated, and it goes on so easily. Now, when my wife starts to dress for dinner, I usually make my escape as quickly as possible, and always before its time to don these instruments of torture known as corsets. This ordeal always reminds me of a verse I read somewhere about a young man, who quite by accident saw his lady dressing; it went somewhat like this:

'She took a garment of awful shape,
It wasn't a waist, not yet a cape;
But it looked like a piece of ancient mail,
Or an instrument from a Russian jail;
And then, with a fearful groan and gasp,
She squeezed herself in its deathly clasp,
So fair and yet so fated.
And then, with a move like I don't know
 what
She tied it on with a double knot,
And, the poor man woefully waited.' "

"One of the things I am thankful for today is that men don't have to wear them!"

"Well," said Bruce, "it seems the fair sex do have more than their share of annoy-

ances; that's why we should spoil them a little."

"Spoil us indeed," ventured Marvina; "it is mostly we who spoil you!" She was very amused at Blake's little speech, and a little surprised at his display of humor.

"Want to take a walk, Stuart?" asked Bruce, "it's a lovely night; the air is wonderful, and our guests won't be arriving for some time yet. I have just been reluctantly dragged in to greet you."

"Nothing would please me more," replied Stuart; "this air is like a tonic to us poor city-cramped office toilers!"

"Have a cigar?" asked Bruce.

"Thanks!"

Marvina called after them; "Please Bruce, don't oblige me to come and fetch you again; watch the time!"

"All right, dear!" came dimly from the distance.

The first dinner guests had arrived before Mrs. Blake made her appearance, so there was no time for any personal conversation between the two women before dinner, a fact which rather pleased Marvina, as she wished to have a chance to study the wife

of this partner before being confronted with a tete-a-tete.

III

There were twenty couples seated at the beautiful banquet table; Marvinna was one of those indefatigable hostesses. The smallest detail was important enough to give her undivided attention to; her guest list was as important to her as her menu, and was selected with great care.

There were represented lawyers, bankers, army officers, authors, poets, musicians, ministers, and interesting people from various walks of life, among the dinner guests. Marvinna had placed Stuart at her right; at her left was seated a cousin, who had been an officer in the late World War, and who, as an aviator, had had some very thrilling experiences. Marvinna could always depend upon Colonel Stanley Malvern to amuse a dull guest, so she placed Mrs. Blake next to that charming young gallant, with whispered orders to use every charm he possessed to amuse the fat lady next to him if he were to have the prettiest girl in the room for a dance partner.

This order was given with one of Mar-

vina's most bewitching smiles, which were always irresistible. "Very well, my dear cousin, watch me add another conquest to my list, but, remember my reward. I want the little lady over there." He nodded to an alcove where a slender young girl stood chatting with Marjory and a few of her young friends. "For my partner, the one with eyes like stars and hair like moonlight: the one in that cloud of blue fluff."

Marvina was decidedly amused. "Stanley, what is the matter with you? Falling in love again, and at first sight this time? That young lady, is Miss Violet Elsworth; you do as I bid you, and I will see that you are the first to write on her dance card!"

Just then, Martin announced dinner. Marvina watched her guests file in: then, as Stuart came up and offered her his arm, she accepted and followed them. She glanced down the long table to where her husband stood, tall and handsome, and smiled at the look of admiration he bestowed on her.

Chapter 2

I

“Before we are seated,” said the host, “I want to announce a little surprise, and also a real treat. At seven-forty-five,” glancing at his watch, “we have just five minutes to wait, we are to hear our President deliver a short Thanksgiving message over our radio; it will be broadcasted from the White House, after which grace will be sung by Washington Baptist Church choir, and a benediction by its minister. That leads me to remark what a marvelous age we are living in, and how vastly different from the very humble surroundings of the first Thanksgiving which took place in the early dawn of American history. Not so very long ago, we had to make our own dinner speeches and say our own grace; now it comes to us out of the air. It is truly marvelous.”

“After dinner we will be furnished with dance music over the radio by the famous orchestra of the Pennsylvania Hotel in New

York. For those who do not care to dance, there is a collection of moving picture reels in the library on the third floor; the screen is up in the Oriental room, and Martin is an expert operator; he will be glad to run off any of the reels you select!"

Almost before the host had stopped speaking, the President's message was being announced by a formal introduction. There was a round of enthusiastic applause, and then silence, as the voice of the President of the United States spoke in a clear ringing tone which filled the room, each word being as distinct as though he had stood at the head of the table. Then a great organ pealed forth.

The voices of the choir seemed to be inspired by Heaven; the music was divine; the kind of music which sends one's soul soaring to the clouds.

Thanksgiving Grace *arr. by G. W. O.*

The image shows a handwritten musical score for a hymn titled "Thanksgiving Grace". The score is written on four staves, each with a different vocal part indicated by the clef: Soprano (treble clef), Alto (treble clef), Tenor (treble clef), and Bass (bass clef). The key signature is one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are written below the staves, with some words underlined. The lyrics are: "Fa. Ther we Thank Thee for gifts from a. love. We give Thee thanks for all Thy wondrous love. Bless Thy our love. Thy it's people all to-day. Oh keep us hold us in Thy love al-ways...!"

After that the beautiful benediction. As the last "amen" died away, a little thrill of admiration spread through the room, more felt than spoken. Then as the hostess took her seat, the gentlemen seated the ladies and every one began to talk at once, though it seemed to be rather difficult to get back to silly worldly chatter after the performance of the past fifteen minutes. There was something sacred and weird in it all.

II

When Mrs. Blake found herself seated next to a charming young man and entirely surrounded by delicious food she was very happy and she smiled. When she smiled, her violet eyes became narrow sparkling slits in a face made more or less expressionless by fat: when she laughed, her eyes were entirely invisible, and her breast rose and fell like miniature twin mountains. She had the good taste however to dress in black, and her hair was still beautiful.

Marvina had placed Mrs. Blake within hearing distance, because she wanted to learn something of her character and personality by her conversation, but as the poor woman had an uncontrollable appetite, she

neglected conversation entirely until her hunger was satisfied. It was wonderful to see how cleverly she manipulated the loaded fork, as she conveyed it from her plate to her mouth, but managed a safe landing with each cargo.

Marvina chatted with Blake, and pretended not to be paying any attention to any one else, but she kept an eye on all that was going on.

"Remarkable invention, this new radio system, Mrs. Mansfield; I have seldom heard such a perfect performance as this one," said Blake.

"Yes, isn't it wonderful; I am simply awestricken at the miracle of it. We have only had this one a week. I am glad that you can be with us tonight, and I am delighted that you were able to induce Mrs. Blake to come; I hope we shall be very good friends."

"Mrs. Blake will like being here when there is a party on; she likes gaiety." He glanced over at his wife: "She is having a perfectly wonderful time!" He smiled his painful little smile.

Just then, Mrs. Blake asked Colonel Malvern: "Who is the lady over there in amethyst velvet, with the silver hair?"

“That,” replied the young officer, “is a bit of rural loveliness who teaches my cousin’s daughter music; her name is Miss Mary Langford, and she has a silvery voice as well as silver hair.”

Stuart had heard and following his wife’s gaze. He became aware, for the first time, of the presence of his old sweetheart.

Marvina noticed a cloud of melancholy stealing over his face, which made him appear suddenly older, and she felt sorry for him. She also felt sorry for his wife and for Mary. After all, was not this man a typical creation, a living symbol of thousands of such dramas and tragedies that lie hidden away in the souls of men and women, beneath the uninteresting surface of apparently simple and commonplace lives? Was Stuart Blake a hero? Marvina thought so; he was kind and true to the mother of his children; he lived in the kingdom of his dreams, and he found consolation in his work; cold perhaps, even a bit hard—at least men called him hard, although he was not unpopular. Bruce liked him; men like strong men.

After Stuart’s discovery of Miss Lang-

ford, Marvina tried to engage him in conversation but he answered little, and the conversation languished, and Marvina was left to occupy herself by listening in on her neighbors' conversation, and occasionally joining in.

One thing had pleased Marvina very much indeed; Mrs. Blake had not remembered Mary Langford. Having met her only once twenty years ago it was not likely she would.

"Don't you think this a beautiful part of the country, Mrs. Blake?" Colonel Malvern was saying.

"I don't like the country," she replied, "if it were not for my children, I would never leave New York City!"

"But," replied Malvern, "it's a wonderful spot to bring up children, and it's a fine place for the tired business man to relax."

"That may be," said Mrs. Blake, "but usually it's the wife who relaxes in the country, while the husband relaxes in a Broadway caberet, romancing with some modern Juliet! Not for me, thanks; I refuse to join the army of wives who are deposited in the country with the kids, to rust

out their lives with the cows and chickens, while the husbands live in the energizing atmosphere of the big city!"

"Mrs. Blake, I feel sure, that I shall be able to convert you to the charms of country life before we are very old friends. You see, we are so near New York, that we can enjoy it just as much, as though we lived in the city, especially in these wonderful times of electric railroads and automobiles," said Marvinna.

"Not forgetting aeroplanes," put in Colonel Malvern.

"I am sure I could never get used to it," exclaimed Mrs. Blake, "I just love Broadway; I love to go out with Stuart and some friends after the theatre and have a nice cosy supper in one of those Broadway bowers, where there is a syncopating orchestra: the lights, good music, and gay dancers all hold a thrill for me. I just could not live without it all!"

"You forget the miraculous age we are living in to-day," said Marvinna; "we can have the orchestra right in our own homes, just as we are having one of those syncopating orchestras play for us to dance to-

night, over the radio. It sounds just as clear, as though you were in the ballroom where it is playing. We can have all the things you like right out here in our home and the atmosphere is purer and finer, you must admit."

"You are right to a certain extent," replied Mrs. Blake, "your home here is certainly fascinating; there is a glow and warmth about it, that one seldom finds. This home would be charming anywhere, Mrs. Mansfield, and the modern equipment such as the radio and moving pictures are really most amazing."

"There, I knew I would make a convert of you," said Marvina.

"Well," replied Mrs. Blake, "if I could choose the site for such a home I would choose the top of the Times Building; they are building homes on top of New York skyscrapers now-a-days, you know, and I would just love to live on top of the Times Building!"

"You are certainly a staunch defender of the city dwellers, Mrs. Blake," said Colonel Malvern; "but if you come out here in

June, and live for awhile in my cousin's garden, you are sure to succumb to the real charms of the flowers, birds and butterflies. There is no orchestra in the world that makes music so sweet as the song of the birds, and the gorgeous array of colors, the perfume and perfect splendor of the scene, with gay winged butterflies sipping the honey from the hearts of the flowers; you will never want to leave the spot."

"Now Stanley, I know you are in love again," remarked Marvinna, after that speech.

"Speaking of butterflies," said Mrs. Blake, "reminds me of my old nickname; they used to call me 'the golden butterfly' when I was a girl. Just think, I weighed ninety-five pounds when I was married. I tried to diet, but I just can't. How do you keep your slenderness, Mrs. Mansfield?" she asked, glancing a bit enviously at Marvinna's slender waist line.

"Well, to begin with, I am very energetic, and I must confess I am a little careful about my diet these days. It is rather a nuisance."

Finally, the seemingly endless succession

of courses ceased. During dinner Stuart had been chatting with the lady on his right, from time to time, but Marvina felt that he was really listening to the conversation between his wife and hostess.

Marvina rose, and smiled around the table as a signal for the ladies to follow her and leave the gentlemen to chat over their cigars and coffee. Stuart moved Marvina's chair and stood watching the ladies trail out, with something of the expression of Napoleon at Saint Helena. Marvina could not make out just what his emotions were; whether he was mad or sad, or annoyed, but it was very plain that he was not very happy.

III

Marvina, for various reasons, was anxious to make a very intimate friend of Mrs. Blake, one of them being, that she thought business partners should be like a big family; it meant a better understanding, and a closer association: another was, that Bruce had taken a decided liking for Blake, and felt that a little wholesome society would be good for him. So Marvina, determined to make a friend of Mrs. Blake, took her arm and walked over to where the radio was in-

stalled, in an alcove of the drawing room.

"Have you ever inspected one of these installations, Mrs. Blake? Personally, I simply can't get over the wonder of it!"

"No" replied Mrs. Blake, "I would like to get one; I am sure it must be lots of fun!"

"You see this little wheel or dial? That is the 'tuner'; we turn that until we find a broadcasting station. This dial is the 'generator,' to make the sound loud or soft. Listen, 'Station K. D. K. A. Pittsburg,'" came over in a clear ringing voice. Just then they were interrupted by music from the piano; they stepped back into the drawing room and saw Mary Langford seated at the piano. Marjory was standing by her and several ladies urging her to sing.

"Miss Langford's face is very familiar, but I can't place her," said Mrs. Blake; "she is most attractive, and very young to have white hair." . . .

"She is a very sweet girl; Marjory has been studying with her for the past few weeks, and I think her voice is improving already."

Marvina was careful to avoid any discovery on Mrs. Blake's part, as to the existing friendship between Stuart and Miss Lang-

ford. She was not quite sure as to the effect on Mrs. Blake; sometimes it is not quite so comfortable to find one's self in the same gathering with an old sweetheart of one's husband, especially when the comparison is not complimentary to the wife.

Mary was nearly seventeen when Stuart was married; Mrs. Blake was twenty-five, though she did not look it at the time: now, Mary was thirty-six and looked ten years younger; Mrs. Blake was forty-five and looked ten years older; Mary was accomplished and interesting, Mrs. Blake was not.

Mary began to sing: "In My Heart There Lives a Song," by Gena Branscombe; and the song did live in her heart. The beautiful words; the exquisite music and the thrill of joy in her voice, it was like a wonderful symphony played on the heart strings of her audience; it stirred the very soul.

The women seated themselves about the spacious drawing room, and at the first note, the men came tip-toeing in quietly and stood grouped about the entrance to the dining room listening admiringly.

When the singer finished, there was a round of hearty applause and "encore," "encore" rang through the rooms.

The gentlemen found seats, and as Mary protested gently, they insisted upon her singing another song. "But," she said laughingly; "I have no wish to turn my hostess' dance into a song recital."

Colonel Malvern came over with some music in his hand and placed it in front of Mary: "Please sing this, Miss Langford 'On the Wings of Song.'" . . . It is my favorite; please do," he whispered with his most engaging smile; "we can always dance, but we can't always have you sing for us!"

Once more Mary's silvery voice filled the room while every one sat enthralled and Stuart gazed pensively into the fire.

"Surely the human voice, when it is divine, is like an Aeolian harp of a thousand strings," thought Marvina. "Who among us have heard it in song, without the thought of all we hold most dear? Memory awakes and the mind turns to cherished treasures, hidden away from mortal eye. . . . Scenes, faces, hopes and fears pass in swift review, inspiring and quickening the soul as the dew reincarnates and brings new life to buds and blossoms. . . . It recalls the fresh odors of Spring; the glory of summer,

the brilliancy of autumn, and the beauty of rose-colored sunsets on winter snow. . . . The touch of a vanished hand, the coo of the babe, the joy of childhood, the caress of wife and mother, the moist and clinging lips of maid and mistress, 'neath the joyous delight of its sweet beneficence, love is deified; love of God and of life, of all animate and inanimate nature." . . .

And as she studied the faces of her guests who listened in profound attention, she thought, 'Music is really the great spiritual charm of the universe, nothing so surely dispels the clouds of doubt and defeat . . . so persistently invades the inner sanctuary of our affections—soothes, yet thrills the heart so strongly, appeals to all that is purest and best in that complex thing we term the 'mind' " . . .

"All music hath charms and a place in history. . . . Without it, much that is noble and heroic and great and good would never have been written. . . . Surely, the sweetest of all sounds is the rhapsody of the voice, omnipotent, because born of human effort . . . pleading and uplifting, because so nearly attuned to that harmonic intuition which can only come from

the whispering gallery of Heaven. . . .”

“Thrice blessed be the sweet throated songsters who live to bless,” thought Marvinna, as she pondered on, “as do the birds that fill the forest in Spring; whose notes are like the pearling rippling waters, bearing a message of faith and hope and charity to a wayward humanity . . . betokening an ethereal, yet positive presence . . . commanding, yet plaintively pleading, . . . telling always, in rythmatic purity and melodious measures, the old, old story of laughter and love, joy and sorrow, tears and triumphs, the beauty of friendship and the sublime consciousness of convictions. . . . Inspiration wafted to us on the night winds of wanton witchcraft and yet—Heaven sent is the voice of woman in song; a gift from the Gods! Oh! wonderous power to appeal to the heart of man.”

As these beautiful thoughts filled Marvinna’s mind, she watched Stuart Blake. He had drifted away “On the Wings of Song;” he did not look at Mary, but, as he gazed into the fire, he saw her beautiful face just as plainly as he felt the thrill of her voice as she sang. . . .

Chapter 3

I

Stuart Blake spent a very quiet evening at the Thanksgiving dinner; one would never suspect the things that were going on in his mind, or the emotions that stirred his heart.

After Mary's song he had replaced the mask and put on his armor.

Outwardly he was calm, uninteresting, because apparently uninterested; his attitude was such as to make one think him a man whose fountain of youth had prematurely dried up; whose heart no longer responded to human sentiments; whose capacity for enjoyment had atrophied, as a result of lost confidence in humanity. He looked for all the world like a man who had taken the advice of the cynic: "Devote your three score and ten, you idiot, to getting ready to die; don't laugh; let your face freeze, you fool, and let your mind dwell on bygones, and a world of woe! Don't love

anything, anybody—'tis but a weakness of the flesh which the Creator carelessly overlooked in preparing the plans and specifications, comprising the structural architecture and component parts of Adam and Eve, because of which there was that first affair!"

II

If a friend had suddenly slapped Stuart Blake on the back and said: "Cheer up, old man; you look ready for the hanging!" He would have smiled his painful little smile and said, "Oh! I am all right; that is just my make-up!"

As a matter of fact, it was not his make-up at all; it was a pose to protect this uninterested cold exterior which Blake turned to a cold critical world. It was like the armor of the knights of old; a shield in life's combat; a shield to protect a truly tender heart and sensitive soul. . . .

Marvina being an observant student of human nature, made this analysis of Blake's character, in explaining just what she thought of Blake's behavior during the evening of the Thanksgiving dinner.

"You are very generous, my dear," said

Bruce, "and you use rather flowery language. I thought his behavior most extraordinary, and very bad form. Why he sat around like a bump on a log; had nothing to say for himself, and finally disappeared entirely; and yet, in spite of his bad manners, he is a likeable cuss. . . . I get very much out of patience with him, but I am hanged if I can help liking him!"

"He is really a fine fellow at heart," replied Marvina; 'he is just soul-sick. . . . In enclosing himself in armor, he has shut out the great divine inflow; he is not 'In Tune with the Infinite' . . . I shall send him a copy of Waldo Trine's wonderful book; it is sure to help him find himself."

"That is a happy thought," said Bruce; "there are enough fine thoughts in that book to cure the world's ills, both mental and physical, if the world would only read and accept. . . . You amuse me very much, Marvina dear, picturing Blake as an armored knight. You should see him at the office; he sits there more like a mud-turtle than a knight, and he can draw in his shell just as quickly as the turtle, and snap just as forcefully."

"Well," laughed Marvina, "'we shall have

to see that the future head of the firm sheds his shell and reveals himself as my knighted hero." . . .

This conversation took place after the party on Thanksgiving night; Marvinna sat before her dressing table brushing out her long wavy hair, while Bruce sat in his bathrobe and slippers admiring her reflection in the mirror.

"Well, seriously speaking," said Bruce; "Blake has got to change; it is necessary for his own good and for the success of the firm; he is the proverbial wet blanket. There are seven important elements which are absolutely necessary to the foundation of success; hope, ambition, ability, strength, courage, confidence and enthusiasm! If one of these is lacking, the chance for success is weakened. Blake possesses only one of these elements: ambition. . . . He unconsciously or otherwise, places his wet blanket over the enthusiasm of his co-workers, and retards our success; and success means so much! It doesn't mean just our success: each individual success means a more successful world; it means the world's work; it means the great invisible force which keeps the great economic wheel

turning, the great commercial machine in motion." . . .

Marvina had stopped brushing her hair and turned to her husband; Bruce did not often philosophize; he was too boyish and carefree to be really serious, but once in a while he would get these philosophic moods, and at such times his spoken thoughts were a source of keen delight to his wife. It was as though he held up the mirror of his soul for her inspection; "these big thoughts are the real source of his perpetual youth and good humor: the secret of his glad heart," reflected Marvina as she replied:

"It's a wonderful world, and filled with more meaning than most of us realize, that little word, 'success'; but go on, dear, I love to listen to your real philosophy of life."

Bruce laughed a little; "I am not sure that I have a real philosophy of life," he said, "but one thing I am sure of, and that is, the process of decay of both body and mind begins with the loss of enthusiasm, which forms the basis for hope and ambition: once the spirit of enthusiasm is dead, a vital force of destruction soon follows.")

"To acknowledge fear of failure, deficiency, or lack of ability, or to harbor doubt

in any degree, is to weaken the very foundation of achievement."

"Success is born of effort, we know; but, my dear, it is stirred by enthusiastic confidence. The world only stands aside for a man who is courageous, and if he must face misfortune, faces it with a smile! But, here I am, rattling on and you are tired, dear!"

He rose and put his arms about her: "There, I am going to tuck you in and say 'goodnight' this moment."

As she yielded to his gentle caress, she smiled up at him and said: "I am a little tired, but, oh! so happy dear, and I am sure that between us, we shall be able to pull Mr. Blake out of his rut; all he needs is more love and more light, which brings a better understanding and a clearer vision." . . .

"I think you are right," said Bruce, as he leaned over and kissed his wife "goodnight" He opened the windows, and then went to his room which adjoined Marvinna's, giving her a "goodnight" smile as he softly closed the door. . . .

Marvina smiled back at him: "God is love, and love enlightens the world," she whispered as she closed her eyes to enter slumber land. . . .

III

Stuart Blake in the meantime paced the garden path of "Awari," confronted with a situation which he had never dreamed existed until that evening.

For twenty years he had been married to the wrong woman; life had been merely an existence with a strange woman whom he did not know; with whom he had nothing in common. He had made a sort of habit of duty, and this realization had come to him suddenly as he sat by the fireside in that charming home, listening to the song which Mary had sung to his heart.

Slowly he had realized that he loved Mary with all his heart, and that realization had given him a terrible jolt. For the first time in his life he was frightened.

There was one very valuable virtue which always came to Stuart's aid in time of need,—discretion. Not only did it always save him from sinning, but also from discovery, which in itself was even more important.

“ 'Tis human to err, and common to repent, but being found out is inexcusable. Transgression of some sort seems to be es-

sential to human happiness; without it, love would lose its priceless heritage of forgiveness, and the star of virtue cease to shine," thought Stuart as he pondered over his predicament.

Though he seemed to have no power over the present situation, Stuart felt sure, that to fall in love with another woman, was the height of transgression for a married man.

It meant two wrongs; the one most wronged his wife: exceedingly unjust to the other woman.

"Fate, that eternal Jester, is always busy making people victims of circumstance," thought he.

As he sat by the fire listening to Mary's appealing, love-laden voice, he felt a mad, boyish impulse to go and stand by her side; to let her read his secret; to let the love in his eyes find its reflection in hers.

"What a mean trick that would be; I could not do that," he thought, "not while there is a barrier between us! No matter how much the existing ties may torture me, I will never do that: I will be discreet; I must be, for her sake." . . .

Then the memory of that ill-fated day on the little lake, so many years ago, rose once

more before him. He remembered the laughter which had died in her wonderful eyes, as Fate—hard of heart, grim and pitiless—with its cold, keen-edged wit, had grinned in fiendish glee, and as Cupid flung his dart at random, gloated over the mischief wrought by his erring aim. . . .

VI

Stuart forgot his surroundings, forgot his social obligations and all else, except the necessity of escape from temptation. He would not allow himself to speak to her, much as he had longed to do so; he did not dare to lay himself open to discovery.

Suddenly, the room became close; things seemed to close in upon him; he felt as though he were smothering; he longed for solitude. He rose and fled from the room; out in the frosty air he could breathe and fight his problem out alone.

To and fro he walked on the path by the side of the silvery silent lake, in pursuit of his lost poise.

It is strange how an emotion so beautiful can bring with it black despair. Stuart could not face this situation which to him

seemed so hopeless and shameful with the same optimism with which he would have faced it fifteen or twenty years ago; that youthful optimism with which he greeted his uncle after the panic, had departed with the struggle of the years.

He had lived with Velora a life which—with the exception of his children—had merely meant empty existence. Until tonight he had not realized how dull their life and its unrestful composite of the commonplace had been.

VII

As he walked up and down under the blue sky with its celestial jewels of moon and stars, and pondered on, he knew that he had been the dupe of the soul of youth, which with few exceptions, is blind, understanding only its desire, the mad tempest of the moment; ruling a heart which listens only to unreasoning wisdom.

Somehow, all unconsciously, he found himself in the land of the "Might Have Been," the land of many regrets, heart-throbs and sighs.

In the divine presence of an all-powerful

love and passion, that physical soul-sense, —dominant and undeniable—that entirely human element which none the less is God-given; that pure, because perfect love which makes, rules and glorifies the world, Stuart for a time became transformed and exalted, a condition so well understood when one is under its spell, yet defies analysis.

“We might have wandered hand in hand down all these years, my only love! The years which have been so empty, might have been filled with the inspiration of your beauty, wit, charm and intelligence. Together we might have greeted each glad day and watched for the first stars to herald the nights, and every one a red rose.” . . .

“Curse the Fate that robbed me of all worth while in life—the love and companionship of the one woman,” whispered the unhappy man to the night. . . . And the answer came back from the depth of conscience:

“Fate is only the consolation and the excuse of fools.”

Then, Duty, the Spectre, rose before his distorted mind, with somber face and scrawny finger pointing the way: (Duty, the ruling destiny of his life.

—all our life

Duty whispered in a harsh ugly voice, "There is honor, the chains of which though they may gall and torture unwilling flesh, are fast fettered. You must listen to the voice of Duty though your heart may break and you are damned forever! Your dream must end,—you must not see her again! Through all the wintry years because of your country's laws, although repealed in the Court of Love whose ruling since Creation has been supreme, you must be loyal to an unloved wife, who stands convicted of love-thieving."

"Love is many sided and subject to both material and spiritual interpretation. The sorrows and delights of past centuries have been ruled by this all-powerful emotion, it is not surprising that I should be disturbed," thought Stuart. It takes its humble subjects down into the depths of black despair and climbs the mountain tops of joyous delights, but in its rosy morning there is found that which is divine indeed, because nearest to immortality." "Why have I missed that rosy morning" he mused? "Why did I choose the imitation instead of the genuine jewel?"

The sound of rumbling motors on the

drive announced the departure of the guests, yet Stuart still remained alone out under the stars, fearing to look again upon what he had lost. . . . The sound of the last departing motor was dying away in the distance, and from the windows of "Awari" the lights one by one disappeared. . . . All was silent . . . and still a lone man wandered in his lost Garden of Delight. . . .

Chapter 4

1

Colonel Malvern took Mary home after the Thanksgiving dinner at "Awari."

She thanked him most graciously and waited at the door until he had departed, watching the smart little car disappear into the night. Then she slipped off her satin pumps and crept noiselessly up stairs to her cosy old-fashioned room, where the maid of all work had made a log fire to take off the autumn chill.

It was one o'clock by the little gilt time-piece which was ticking merrily away on the mantelpiece. The logs had burned out, leaving a heap of coals, and the room was warm and comfortable.

The old-fashioned cottage had recently been wired, and Mary switched on the shaded lights which adorned her antique bureau; quickly undressed and donned her comfy dressing gown and slippers as she

pondered over the events of the evening.

Mary Langford did not claim to be angelic perfection; she was really very human, but she was a woman whose life was almost entirely ruled by the three Graces: Faith, Hope and Charity. She had every sweet gracious gift of body and mind, tho' she was timid and over-modest because of her lack of association with the outside world. We admire the beautiful peacock when it unfolds its magnificent beauty and struts out before an admiring world, but Mary had never unfolded her beauty; she had never learned to reveal her charms. What a pity! Beauty should be given to the world; beauty of mind and beauty of grace. God did not bestow it, only to have it hidden away; it is a blessing bestowed for the glory and good of humanity.

Courtesy and kindness and fairness to friend and foe were among her many charming characteristics, but there were times, when like all human beings she had to fight the devil and the flesh. Tonight there was a big fight on in Mary's heart; she was sorely tempted to let the destroying evils,—jealousy and hatred—take possession of her soul. She was very tired, but not

sleepy; she longed to sit alone by the glowing coals and think, . . . ponder over the past, the present, and the cold, empty, lonely future.

“So, that is what his ‘Golden Butterfly’ has become; just a huge lump of common clay; lazy, selfish and unlovely; a parasite feasting on the efforts of others.” . . . Mary’s mouth twitched, and her eyes burned like the live coals on the hearth.

“That is the woman he has loved?” She found herself whispering the words “has loved,” “can it be possible that he still loves her?” She is the mother of his children: they still live together, but she is not good enough.”

Mary had sung and smiled and danced through the evening, but as often happens, the gaiety covered an aching heart, because all she had received from Stuart had been that one little nod of greeting while she sat at the piano, . . . had he purposely avoided her? Why?

Mary knew that she hated Velora Blake: she was jealous of the woman who for twenty years had robbed her of what she felt was rightly hers; of the man she loved, of all that implied, husband, home, children,

. . . everything that was worth while in life. Velora could just as well have married some one else, but Mary was the kind that loves only once, and loves with all her soul; a deep, loyal, lasting, unselfish love.

Suddenly she began to tremble; her head ached; she felt ill and utterly miserable. She rose and bathed her burning eyes and aching head in some cold water, then she looked at her face in the mirror; it was a strange, unfamiliar face unknown to her.

“What is wrong with me?” she asked the reflection in the mirror, and then she suddenly realized that she had allowed malice, hatred and jealousy to creep in and poison her soul and body. . . . It was this poison which had affected her body and soul, had paralyzed her will, and had deprived her of her courage and self-control. “Evil influences like these do not enter the heart in which perfect faith abides,” whispered conscience, “only those who believe can conquer evil; only those who can master themselves can know the sweet content of service; without faith, the soul must die and shrink down into black night shrouded in doubt and despair. Faith is the child of

love and the mother of laughter; I will keep my faith!"

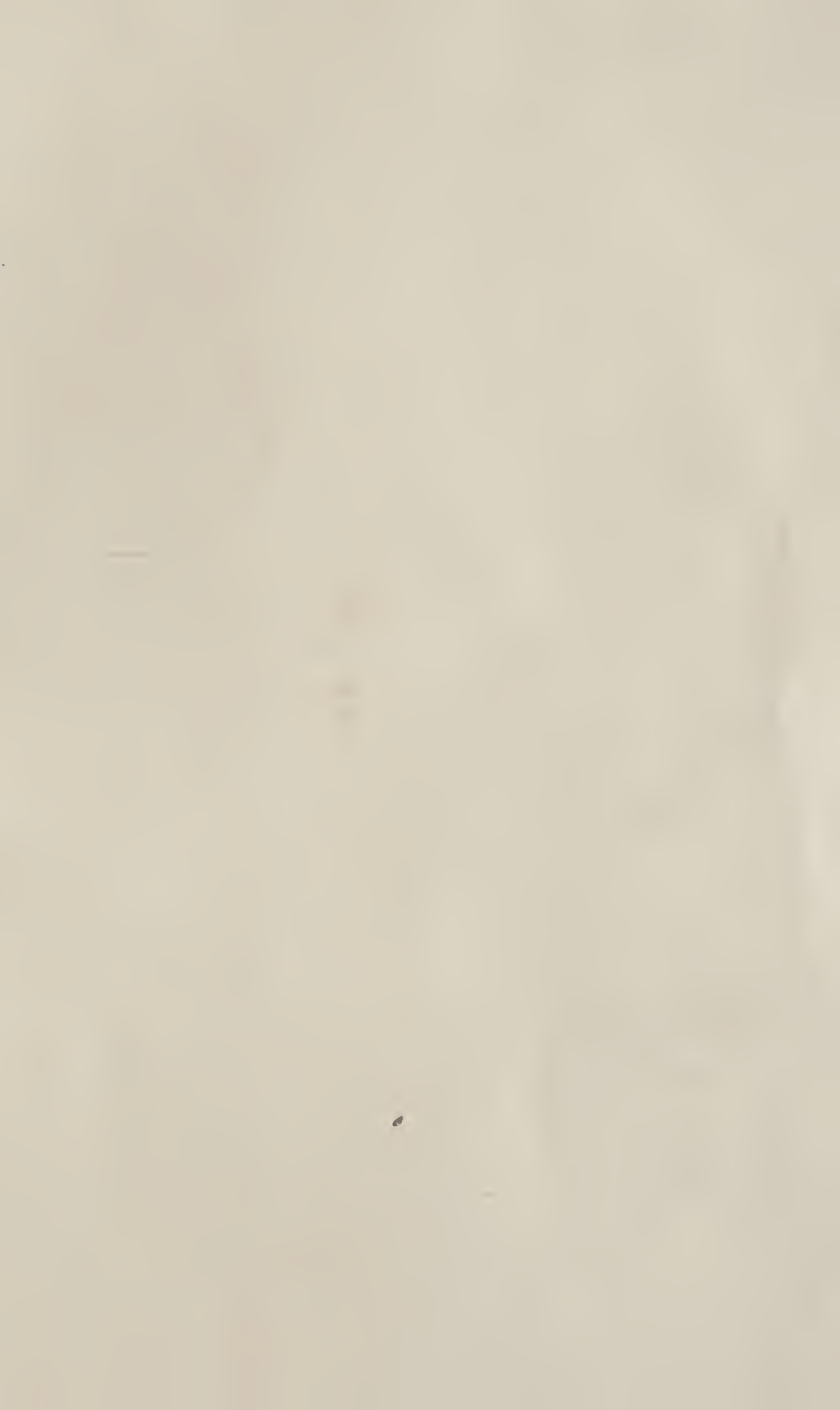
Then tears came as welcome as rain in the parched desert, and through them came a smile of hope, shining through these tears, like sunshine through showers. Hope . . . that supernatural pledge of a brighter dawn and happier days to come; that light, which makes the future possible; Hope . . . that soothing balm with which a just God softens failure and defeat, and heals a hurt heart; Hope . . . the wonderful all powerful solace of the present and halo of the future.

Mary was gradually winning her fight, step by step: the great soul was again coming into the realization of its oneness with God. The headache and nervous trembling left her; she went over to the fireplace and stood looking up at a picture of the three Graces, symbolized by the three Greek maidens in flowing robes. . . . somehow this picture always seemed to help Mary.

"I have not been very charitable," she thought, as she gazed at the picture, "but with Faith and Hope in my heart it is easier to be charitable; and surely, charity means

infinite love and understanding, and above all, forgiveness. Surely, charity was the most beautiful thing which lived in the heart of that most wonderful of all personalities, the Gentle Nazarene." . . .

In perfect faith little tired Mary lay down to rest in refreshing untroubled slumber, to awaken with renewed hope on the morrow and charity for the dead day. . . .



The Lady of Quality.

Chapter 5

I

The morning after the Thanksgiving dinner, Marvinna came downstairs rather late, to find Mrs. Blake enjoying an ample breakfast all alone. "The men hurried off to the Valley View Golf Club," she said, after the morning greetings, "they said we could motor over and fetch them for luncheon."

"Really, I must apologize for my tardiness," said Marvinna; "I always indulge in a little laziness after a big party; I feel that I deserve it; nine-thirty, dear me, how time flies. . . . Our good husbands are evidently feeling rather energetic this morning."

"So it seems, but husbands are queer mortals as a rule," replied Mrs. Blake; "they are usually energetic when it comes to doing what pleases them, but if one tries to get them to use a little of that energy in a fox trot or one step, most of them assume that

martyred tired business-man attitude, which is sure to take all the joy out of life. Your party was a tremendous success, Mrs. Mansfield; how on earth can one woman have so much energy! I don't think I have ever seen anything so beautiful; I should not mind the country if it were always as gay as last night."

"There is a great deal of entertaining going on in the community; too much really, I fear; most of us work too hard at having a good time. I am glad you liked the party, and I wish you would stay over until Monday; I would love to show you about a bit!"

Marvina was being served dry toast, poached eggs and coffee; Mrs. Blake was just finishing a very ample portion of oatmeal and bacon and eggs, candied potatoes, buttered toast, marmalade and coffee. "You are very kind, my dear, but I have a theatre party on for tonight and besides, I have a new nurse for the baby, and servants are so untrustworthy! One never knows what may happen if they are left alone for twenty-four hours!"

"Children are wonderful," said Marvina; I can understand your anxiety for them, but

the joy of motherhood makes up for all the cares and anxieties, I think."

"Some times I am not quite sure of that," replied Mrs. Blake; "of course Virginia is nearly sixteen, and has been very little trouble or care to me, because I had my mother with me from the time she was born until my mother died, about a year ago. Mother was wonderful, she took full charge of the children and the housekeeping; since she passed away I have been simply lost!"

"How very selfish," thought Marvinna, but aloud she said: "You were very fortunate to have your mother take those responsibilities off your shoulders for so long and I am sure you must miss her dreadfully, but your daughter is old enough to be a real companion for you now and your younger daughter must be a real joy!"

"Yes, that is all true; but now, that I no longer have my mother's help, I find the responsibility of the baby very trying. She is only two years old; she was one of those surprises that sometimes come to us late in life, and after fourteen years she certainly was unexpected."

"Just the same, it must be delightful to have a little sunbeam like that in the house

at this time of your life, I think youth reflects youth, and there is nothing like a baby in the house to instill youth in the household," said Marvina.

"That may be true, but as much as I love the baby, she gets on my nerves. I could not stand to have the full responsibility of her," replied Mrs. Blake, "and when I knew that I was to become a mother again after fourteen years, I almost went crazy: you see, I am so fat and so much older I was sure it would kill me, and at that time, I assure you, I was a very strong convert to birth control! I wept the whole time and begged my husband to prevail on the doctor to do something to prevent further development but it seems nothing could be done." "Nothing could be done" they said, but I think this was only because of the longing in Stuart's heart to have a son."

Marvina really felt sympathetic toward this modern mother as she listened to the perplexities, responsibilities and cares involved in her experience of motherhood.

"Your husband simply adores the little one," she said, "He was telling us in a proud fatherly fashion all about her cute baby

ways and sayings the first time he came out."

"Yes," replied Mrs. Blake, "she is a very beautiful child! My poor mother said she was the very image of me when I was a baby; she has the same violet eyes and golden hair, but I really believe Stuart thinks more of Virginia, who is very much like her father, both in looks and manner!"

Just then they were interrupted by a piano introduction and a fresh young voice came floating down from the music room.

"What an adorable daughter you have, Mrs. Mansfield, and what a beautiful voice she has; I thought she sang quite as well as her teacher last evening."

"Yes, Marjory is a great joy in my life, she always has been and I feel sure she always will be; you must allow Virginia to come out and visit Marjory; she loves to entertain just as much as I do; I think it is in the blood of us Southerners; we are never so happy as when our home is filled with our friends."

"Thank you, I am sure Virginia would enjoy being here; she is very serious minded; she insists on a career and is going to college next year. Marjory is just the

kind of girl Virginia likes, for though Marjory looks and acts quite like the modern Miss, still there seems to be something quaint and sweetly old-fashioned about her. I am very sorry your son is not home, I have heard that he is a splendid fellow, and judging from his photographs he is certainly a handsome chap."

"We miss him very much; he is spending the Thanksgiving holidays with a college chum, and it is the first time he has stayed away on Thanksgiving; but he will be home at Christmas. He will be twenty-one his next birthday, and he is as big as his father now. We usually have the house full of young people for Christmas, and we would love to have Virginia join us at that time."

"Thanks so much, I am sure she would love to come and I will arrange it," replied Mrs. Blake. After mother's death I gave up our house in West End avenue and took an apartment. I just felt I could not stand the constant worry and aggravation about the servants; of course the apartment makes entertaining at home rather difficult, and house parties an impossibility."

"That is one reason why I could never live in the crowded city, or adjust myself to

apartment dwelling," replied Marvinna; it seems to me the place for children to have a good time is in their home; if they must depend upon public entertainment such as picture shows, theatres, hotels, cafes and resorts I fear they are likely to come in contact with an environment which will have a bad effect on the young mind. Both Marjory and Bruce, Jr. are home-loving children."

"Yes, a home is very lovely, indeed, if one has plenty of competent servants and unlimited means, but otherwise I prefer a hotel, because in the city one really only uses the home as a place to go to sleep; a sort of convenience anyway."

Marvinna having finished her breakfast, sat back in her chair and listened while Mrs. Blake chatted on.

"And is that what Mr. Blake's home means to him; a convenience, a place to sleep," thought Marvinna. "Is that symbolic of the American home of today? I hope not! If that is so, then we should start a society for home restoration at once." Looking at Mrs. Blake, Marvinna thought: "Has she ever had one spark of unselfish passion in her?"

"There are so many apartment hotels these days, with every possible convenience, that I have been thinking seriously of asking Stuart to sublet our apartment and take rooms in one of those palaces of comfort. I have two friends living at the Langdon; they have three large rooms, a bedroom for the two children and their own bedroom, with baths, showers and large closets, and there is a beautiful large living room. There are no household bills, and no servants to bother with; there is excellent maid service and they can either go down to their meals or have them sent up; its really wonderful. Of course, Virginia will be in college in winter, and in summer she expects to go to the girls camp."

II

Marvina was getting a little out of patience with this idea of a mother planning to deprive her children of a home because of sheer selfishness, and as she was most anxious to be amicable to Mrs. Blake she was rather glad that Marjory came tripping in just then and relieved the situation.

"Good morning, lazy little mother," said

Marjory teasingly, as she stood behind her mother's chair and pulled her face up to kiss it:" "I was the first up this morning! I had just finished having breakfast with Mr. Blake and Dad when Mrs. Blake joined us. It is after ten mother, and Dad said: "Please come over to the club about eleven, because Mr. Blake wished to take Mrs. Blake over to his old home before luncheon; they have planned to motor over to Newark, and take the tube in after luncheon."

Marvina smiled at Marjory and slipped one arm round her slender waist, while she glanced at her wrist: "Why, my dear, we have actually been chatting here for an hour! Its ten thirty; you run and bring the car around Marjory dear, and Mrs. Blake and I will get our bonnets on; and would you mind driving for us? Uncle George is busy this morning taking up bulbs."

Addressing Mrs. Blake Marvina said: "Speaking of servants, my dear, those I have are excellent, and I am most fortunate in that respect, but I have not half enough. Servants are the most expensive luxuries there are now-a-days. Uncle George is the cook's husband; he is the gardener and chauffeur and really the Jack-of-all-trades;

then I have the cook who also does the laundry; the butler who is my husband's old servant, and an upstairs girl. With the four we are obliged to get on. We have twenty rooms, and about six acres of gardens and lawn, so you can imagine that there is much left in the way of management and other duties for Marjory and me."

"You are an excellent manager," said Mrs. Blake, "I have three servants in my apartment, of course we have to keep a nurse and then I have a cook and maid, and I am obliged to change every few weeks."

The sound of the motor horn at the door caused the women to hurry off and fetch their coats and hats, and ten minutes later they were speeding along in the direction of the golf club.

Chapter 6

I

“We must have contrasts—so it seems—for purposes of comparison and in order to appreciate the good and the beautiful. If the devil were to die, the Great God Goodness would have no reason for existence, and humanity would drop to a demoralizing dead level,” thought Marvinna, as they motored along. “Surely the contrast between characters is the most interesting of all studies.” Marvinna was anxious to see how a visit to the birthplace of her youthful romance would affect Mrs. Blake. She had watched Mary; had seen her flush and then turn pale; had seen her lips tremble, as she turned away to hide her emotion, that first day she had visited the old homestead with Stuart Blake. . . .

As Marjory drove up to the Club, Bruce and Blake came forward, followed by the caddy with the equipment. “Well, good morning, ladies; we had begun to think we

were forgotten," laughed Bruce: "Get in Blake." Blake climbed in as he greeted Marvinna.

"Good morning, Mr. Blake," said Marvinna, in answer to his greeting; "did you have a good game?" "Not particularly," replied Blake; "neither of us can really play," he continued—making an attempt at a teasing remark to Bruce who thought himself an excellent player—"but we had some very good exercise, so that we have gained the point in view anyhow!"

Turning to his wife he said: "You won't know my old home, Velora; its all dolled up with sleeping porches, sun-parlors, open piazzas, bathrooms, telephones and all the rest of it, and the gardens are greatly improved." Marjory had turned the car and started down the valley road.

"How far is Broad Acres from here?" asked Mrs. Blake; "I don't remember the country at all: I was only out here twice."

"You can see the entrance gate from this hill," said Marvinna, and she pointed to two towering stone gate-posts about a mile ahead.

"Well, at least civilization is growing nearer to it," replied Mrs. Blake, "all I re-

member about it is that it was in the back woods, and I could never understand why people want to live in the back woods."

"We used to be about a mile from the village," said Blake, "but the village has grown to be quite a town and the incorporation post is right next to the old gate-post now. Of course as the estate consists of over a hundred acres and the house sets back on the border of the lake, the growth of the town can never spoil the seclusion of the place."

II

As the car turned into the lane, Blake leaned forward and said: "Miss Marjory, would you please stop up there, by the old orchard? We built a sort of swimming pool up there, and I would just like to see if it is still there."

Marjory pulled up under the bough of an old apple tree which had shed most of its foliage, but still clung to some of its blood red fruit. She turned a smiling face to the occupants of the car and addressing Blake, said: "May we all go to inspect your swimming pool, Mr. Blake?" "You may,

replied Blake; "and I will explain about the workmanship; it really required quite a bit of engineering."

They all alighted and started single file down an old path through the old orchard with Blake in the lead. "I suppose this was sort of a primitive bath tub," said Bruce, turning to Mrs. Blake whom he had tried to assist in her attempts to make her way in satin pumps over the overgrown path.

Mrs. Blake, looking very much annoyed, replied: "I think most things about the country are primitive; the country is simply a place for snakes, mosquitoes and other pests."

"Well, don't look at me when you say that," laughingly replied Bruce.

Just then Mrs. Blake's filmy crepe skirt became hopelessly entangled in some briars which were lying concealed in the path, and the whole thing seemed so utterly ridiculous to her that she began to laugh heartily at the attempt of Bruce to disentangle it. When they finally joined the others at the swimming pool, Stuart, Marjory and Marvinna stood looking very interestedly at

a clear pool of water not much larger than a good-sized wash tub.

“Just think, this is all that is left of my beautiful swimming pool!” “And we worked so hard to build it,” said Stuart. “Mother would not allow us to swim in the lake because of the treacherous holes and undercurrents, and so we built this. We hunted up the springs, then we got stone and sand and cement, and after building the pool, we led the different springs into it by trenching them, so they all joined in one big stream and flowed into the pool: and now look, the one big stream has washed down the wall of the pool and goes rushing on down the hillside as though the pool had not been here at all.” . . .

“For the life of me, I can’t imagine why you drag people through the weeds and briars to look at an old mud hole,” said Mrs. Blake.

Marvina looked from Mrs. Blake to Stuart: she saw him shrink back in his armor as though to protect himself from future blows. Before he had a chance to answer, Marvina made a cup of the palms of her hands and lifted some of the pure sparkling water to her lips: “It isn’t a mud hole; it

is a pure sparkling stream: see, how clear and beautiful the water is!" She drained the improvized cup and dried her hands on some nearby foliage.

III

Mrs. Blake turned and walked back to the car as though her only emotion was boredom, if that can be called an emotion.

"Poor woman," thought Marvinna; "how utterly miserable she must be, if she is blind to all this beauty about her, and the meaning of it all; all this smiling landscape, color-crowned and glorious, dotted here and there with cottages, groves, flocks and pleasant pasture fields, beautiful beyond comparison, and doubly glorified 'neath an autumn sun. This quiet pool where her husband played in happy boyhood, hidden away from profane intrusion, fern clad and sheltered by bush and bough . . . was it in this secluded spot, that all the glorious anticipations of manhood came to Stuart Blake?"

It was to this spot he had wandered in the moonlight many years ago with the "Golden Butterfly," thinking it a fitting shrine for love's confessional. It was here, at even-

tide, he had told the old old story to his mate, as they listened to the call of the whip-poor-will from somewhere in the moonlit distance. Here, he had confessed to the consuming flames of a soul-compelling passion, inspired by the desirable youth and beauty of the woman who had called this clear bubbling stream a mud hole . . . she had thought this a mud hole, and he had thought a flaming passion of youthful manhood was an immaculate, unselfish, enduring love. . . . Ah! One can think wrongly and one can be mistaken; anyway, they were wonderful moments, both in harmony and in sentiment, those youthful moments in the moonlight . . . listening to the gurgling spring and the call of the whip-poor-will, alike ravishing and bewitching, and filled with a pledge of untold happiness. The pledge had been fortified, 'tis true, but Stuart Blake had hoped she might remember as he did, . . . it was plain she had not, whereas to him this wee bubbling stream was like a song of sweetest melody coming to him from over the hills of yesterday.

IV

Marvina rambled about the old orchard and fields in silence, as Stuart pointed out an old landmark here and there: then they joined the others in the car and continued on up to the old house. As they passed the haunted cottage, Marvina shivered slightly as she remembered their former experience.

On reaching the house, Aunt Harriet and Uncle Bill came out to greet the visitors. "Hello, Aunt Harriet," said Velora, her face brightening up at the unexpected sight of her old cook and nurse.

"Fo' de Lord sake, is dat you, Miss Velorie? Well, I sho' never would 'er knowed yo, but fer Mister Stuart. My, my, but yo' sho' has got fat! Why, I use to lift yo' 'bout like a little chile when you was sick; I sho' is glad td see: and how is my little gal, 'spose she is a young lady by now?"

"Yes, Virginia is sixteen, and I have a little girl two years old. Stuart did not tell me you were here."

"Yes ma'am, we been heah eber since you all go to de city." The others had walked on ahead, and Aunt Harriet said: "Won't

you all come in and see de ole house? Its bin all fix up since yo' all was heah."

"Yes," said Velora; "it does look a little more civilized," as she entered the big old fashioned living room. Velora went up to Marvina and said smilingly: "Pardon me, Mrs. Mansfield, I hope you won't think me nosey, but did you order luncheon before you left? As we left in a hurry I thought you might have forgotten. . . ."

Marvina stopped short in her admiration of a fine antique Flemish oak cabinet, and after a moment of utter astonishment, smilingly reassured her guest: "I always attend to planning my meals the day before, when I have guests; luncheon will be served immediately after our arrival home!"

Within herself she thought; "Ye Gods, what a woman; has she a soul, or is she just a walking appetite!"

As Velora seemed bored to tears and entirely uninterested they all got back in the car, after Stuart and Uncle Bill had gone the rounds of the old house and the grounds, and Aunt Harriet had treated her visitors to some wonderful home-made cider, and had emptied a basket of apples in the back of the car.

"How is the family ghost, Uncle Bill, is she still about?"

"Yes sah, sho's yo born, and she ales gwine to be dah till some un done move her body; dat woman don't wanna lay by de side of dat man what mudder her chile! Yo see if yo all jess moves her body, dat po' woman's spirit will res' in peace till de judgment day!"

"Well, perhaps you are right, Uncle Bill; we might get permission to do that," he looked at the others and saw that they were trying to suppress a smile, so he said good-bye, and the party were again on their way.

V

"We will ride down through the town," suggested Marvinna," and show Mrs. Blake how much the place has improved." Marjory turned to the left and motored along through the old Main street, with its conglomeration of old fashioned colonial farmhouses and well kept modern cottages, with little shops tucked in here and there. Nothing was said, until they reached the center of the town, then, suddenly Mrs. Blake exclaimed:" "There is an ice-cream store,

Stuart, do run over and get us all an ice-cream cone!"

Bruce looked horrified and Marvina nearly laughed out loud, but she had a happy thought: "Wait until we get home," she replied, "luncheon will be waiting and if we don't hurry, I fear it will spoil."

Marvina knew that Bruce—like most Englishmen—loathed ice-cream, and she could not possibly imagine him with his face in an ice-cream cone, newsboy fashion.

But Mrs. Blake was insistent and finally had her way about it. To be polite, Bruce accepted the cone, took a nibble much to Marvina's amusement, and quickly dropped his cone outside the car, while no one was looking, but the others like good sports finished theirs to the last piece, even though the party looked a bit like an urchin's picnic. After that they hurried home: Bruce and Blake discussed some business proposition in the back of the car, while Marvina chatted with Mrs. Blake up front. After a hearty luncheon, during which Mrs. Blake partook of every dish as if she had not had a bite to eat since days and days, the party motored over to Newark, which was about a half hour's run. On saying good-bye,

Mrs. Blake insisted on having the Mansfields in for dinner and the theatre during the following week, and so it was arranged.

“I have enjoyed myself immensely,” said Mrs. Blake, on saying good-bye to her hostess, “but what a pity that such a splendid home and charming hostess, and especially such a wonderful cook, should be tucked away in the wilds.”

Chapter 7

I

Stuart Blake had not found becoming a millionaire in New York quite as easy as he had anticipated, in spite of his uncle's experience, his own youthful ambition, and capacity for work.

For seventeen years he had toiled unceasingly without a vacation, without recreation; ambition had worked him hard: he had become a sort of human machine, a sort of "Robot," with a face like parchment and eyes that were as hard and cold as steel.

Through lack of recreation and exercise, he had become a dyspeptic, which made him irritable and nervous, but through it all, there was one thing which Stuart Blake never lost sight of: duty to his family and friends, and duty to business. Yet there was a most important duty, which he had unconsciously overlooked; his duty to that great God-given machine, the human body. "Your body must have proper care," advised

Stuart's doctor. "If that most remarkable of all little engines, the human heart, is to continue functioning properly, there is no man made machine on earth that can compare with this God made tiny apparatus. If the body is taken care of this little engine very often continues to pump away night and day for over a hundred years. If the body is neglected, all sorts of ills result, both physical and mental, until the inevitable end." Stuart paid for the doctor's advice, but did not take it.

Seventeen years—all work and no play—had not brought satisfactory results to Henry G. Slader and Company; it is true they had made money; the debts had all been paid off the first five years; there was the seat on the stock exchange worth a hundred thousand dollars, and the firm had a working capital of half a million. . . . Still the earning capacity of the firm had only reached two hundred thousand per year, and the firm was yet classed with the small houses in Wall Street.

It was the realization of all these things that induced Stuart Blake to suggest to his uncle the advisability of taking in one or two partners.

"Let us go on a hunt for brains; what we need is some new blood in the firm. I believe we have brain fag; grown stale on the job; something is wrong, Governor!"

"Perhaps you are right," replied Slader, "we should be at the top of the ladder long ago. New people coming in may be able to see where the mistakes are; it often works that way!"

II

Two weeks later Richard Sheldon and Bruce Mansfield were induced to join the Slader forces. Six months later the four partners were sitting at the conference table, discussing ways and means of speeding up the organization.

"It is always difficult to come back," said Sheldon; "it is really better to start all over again, but if we reorganize in the proper way, I believe we can make a big success of this firm: we have made a pretty good showing during the past six months!"

"Yes," said Mansfield, "and we are going to make a much better showing during the next six months. One can't fall from the top of the ladder, as Mr. Slader did, with-

out being injured, and the injury makes the climbing back difficult. One of the weak spots of the firm is the timidity of its head; its the old story of "a burned child dreads the fire." Mr. Slader talks about 'thousands' to men who are thinking in 'millions,' and the man who is thinking in 'millions,' is the big man; the man with a broad vision, and he is sure to think the man who talks in 'thousands' small minded. Mr. Slader's vision has been clouded by his unfortunate experience, and that must be cured before we can have any real success!"

"You are right, Mansfield," replied Slader; "however, if you had been through what I have been through, you would understand that condition!"

"We have not done badly, considering," said Blake; "when I came to join the Governor he was in a pretty bad hole; the debts were heavy, the losses staggering, but we have managed to get out of the hole, and we have a firm grip again, though the struggle has undoubtedly weakened us a bit. Now we must reinforce our organization, weed out the parasites, keep only the people who are alert, wide-awake, willing workers."

"Yes," answered Mansfield, "there are at

least three salesmen who are loafing on their jobs; you need a better sales manager, and you need a different office manager."

"And," said Blake, "we are paying too much for these offices. I have been looking about and I have found a suite of offices, consisting of the entire floor, with every room flooded with light and air. Its on the seventeenth floor, with a fine view of the harbor, and its a third less than these, which are gloomy and where one must work by electric light all day, which in itself is depressing."

"That is splendid," replied Slader, "we will have a look at them at once!"

"And before we adjourn," said Mansfield, "I want you to be sure that I am going to put over that big South American deal: it will put us on the map again. What this firm needs is more enthusiasm, more courage, more vision, more optimism, more inspiration. Let us rise to the dignity of Wall Street bankers; let us not remain a mediocre bond house."

Mansfield had managed to instill some of his enthusiasm into all those present, and when they parted, each felt rather exalted;

the spirit of coming triumph showed in their tired eyes.

III

The bachelor partner on his departure, took the subway to Seventy-second street; his mind was filled with plans for the future development of the firm. He was in a very happy, optimistic frame of mind. At Seventy-second street he alighted and walked briskly toward Riverside Drive, stopping at one of those palatial apartment houses, he stepped into the elevator, and was lifted to the fifth floor. He tapped lightly on the first door to the left; anyone else would have pushed the electric bell, but this special little tap conveyed a special message to someone who was waiting within. The door was swung open as if by magic and Dick Sheldon stepped into the cosey little love nest.

"Sorry to be late, little queen," he apologized, "but there was an important conference which I had to attend."

At the first challenge of her rosy lips, the cares and anxieties of the day vanished, "man's nature must ever respond to the

rustle of silk and flutter of lace: he must ever bow low before the throne where Venus holds court," thought Sheldon, as he held his little queen in his arms.

IV

Henry G. Slader dined quietly with his invalid wife. She retired early, leaving him to devote his time to his beloved books, but at ten o'clock he put on his hat and silently left the house, as was his custom, to take a walk down "the drive;" this quiet, open air exercise before retiring was conducive to restful repose. The financier had often explained to his wife.

Ten minutes walk brought him into the presence of one who had the power to change the discords of life into blissful harmony for him. "How stronge is life—how complex, and filled with puzzling problems! How fraught with momentous deeds, with tragedy, great aspirations, blessed dreams, sacrifice, success and black despair! Yet through it all runs the golden thread of romance," thought the great financier as he silently strolled along. For ten years this romance had lived in the heart of Henry

Slader, all unsuspected by his friends and neighbors. How much this beautiful woman meant to him, no one would ever know; her abode was his sanctuary; she was his "Father Confessor!" It was to her that he spoke of his hopes, his temptations, his struggles, his disappointments and hideous fears—his unutterable joys and his unspeakable griefs, of which the rest of the world knew nothing. . . . He loved her with all his heart and her love had been his heaven.

Eveline Reece extended a glad greeting to her benefactor; he had her loving respect and everlasting gratitude, for through his influence and aid she was gradually reaching the realization of her dreams; she was becoming a famous sculptress.

V

Stuart Blake sank back in his seat; he felt tired and somehow lonely after the others had gone. He closed his eyes and tried to visualize the future, the firm's future—his future—but his vision was clouded; he had become a pessimist. He would have liked to be going home to talk over the

day's doings, the future plans for the success of the business, but Velora would not understand, and besides, she hated business as much as she loved food. He sighed a little as he put on his coat, locked up and started on his journey home. At the entrance to the Park Avenue apartment house where he lived, he was halted by the shrill noise of a motor horn; looking up he saw Velora hurrying along in her smart two seated roadster, her face flushed and excited.

"Stuart dear," she burst out, before he had time to speak: "What do you suppose? I have been held up for speeding, and really I wasn't going over twenty-five miles per hour; that nasty policeman just wanted to show his authority."

"But where were you held up, dear?" asked Stuart, always indulgent where Velora was concerned. He felt it a sacred duty since the birth and death of their first born.

"I was hurrying in from Westchester; I went up to Stella's, to a bridge party; we did not stop playing until half past four, and then Stella served a young banquet, and I was afraid I would not be here when you

arrived and that you would be worried; but you are late, too, aren't you?"

"Yes," replied Stuart, "I was detained at a conference; but, aren't you going to get out?" he inquired, as he noticed that she kept her seat.

"Stuart dear, I was wondering if you would mind going to a restaurant to dinner: I had a row with the cook this morning and she left; there is not a thing in the house."

Stuart nodded assent and climbed into the seat next to her.

"We will go to Linden Gardens," she smiled in triumph; "The Dixons and Reynolds will be there, and they say one can get the best food and wonderful wine served openly in iced containers just like the olden days, and one is not obliged to sip it from coffee cups, which entirely spoils the charm of it."

Stuart once more smiled his painful little smile as he was whirled away, and before his tired eyes rose a vision of beautiful, quiet, home-loving little Saint Mary, and the cool quiet old homestead in the beautiful New Jersey hills." . . .

VI

Bruce arrived with all his enthusiasm blazing up in his soul. Marvinna was waiting rather anxiously for him.

"Sorry to be late, dear," he said, with his contagious smile: "tried to get you on the phone, but the line was busy!"

"Ah, well, now that you are here, it is all right!" she smiled up at him as she led the way upstairs. Marvinna perched on the edge of the bath tub as was her custom, and Bruce began to review the day's events; the fine spirit of the partners; the new office plan; the progress of the big South American deal.

"We are going to put it over, old dear," he said, and having submerged his face in the clear cold water, and rubbed it to a rosy glow, he leaned over and kissed her.

He went into his dressing room and took from his brief-case a London cable.

"I brought this home to show you: you have heard of the house; it is one of the biggest houses in London; they have practically accepted our proposition."

"Isn't it wonderful," said Marvinna; "the

charm of business is absolutely irresistible!"

"Yes," replied Bruce, "especially when things go right. This deal is going to put us on the map, the old firm is coming into its own at last, and I am just as glad for Slader and Blake as I am for Sheldon and myself. Slader and Blake are pretty fine old boys, and we are going to be successful: we are going to make money and a name; big money and a big name; and quickly too!"

"Of course you are," agreed Marvinna, as she smiled up at him; then tucking her hand in his, school-girl fashion, they went down to dinner.

And thus the four partners went their different ways; into different environments; which reflect so much on the life, character and accomplishments of each individual.

Chapter 8

I

The Blakes had postponed the dinner and theatre party to the Mansfields, because Mrs. Blake had planned to move; she had, between coaxing and nagging, succeeded in getting Stuart's consent to take a hotel apartment at the Langdon. She had taken him to see it, and with the accurateness of the first class agent, she had pointed out to him all the advantages—both in comfort and economy—to be obtained by the change.

“Think how much we will save on the gas, light, service and laundry: and there is really every possible convenience. The nursery is all paneled in ivory and hung in buff and blue; its just darling. Then there is the living room, done in Italian, and an alcove adjoining it, with a desk and bookshelves which you can use for your study, and each of our bedrooms has private bath

and shower, and one can always get rooms for guests! They always keep some rooms in reserve for transients."

"Well, if you really like it Velora we will take it," said Stuart.

"I think it is adorable," replied Velora. "And it will be just heavenly to be rid of all the worry and annoyance of servants and housekeeping. I loathe the thought of it, and it's making a nervous wreck of me!"

Stuart smiled his painful little smile as he said: "It can never be home, Velora; it will be a sort of roost, just a place to hang one's hat!"

His mind traveled back over the years to the old homestead where the lamp was brought in, and a pleasant half hour was enjoyed in congenial conversation as the family sat around the dinner table.

"Well, I can't possibly understand what more you require," said Velora; "I am sure you will like it as much as I, once we are settled here."

II

Two weeks after the party at "Awari," the Blakes welcomed their guests, Mr. and

Mrs. Mansfield and Marjory, not into their home, but into their hotel.

Mrs. Blake came forward to greet them, with a smile that completely obliterated her eyes, in a much beaded black gown, her golden hair piled in profusion on top of her head, her flesh restrained in brassieres, long hipped corsets and many straps.

"Glad to see you all again," she said, shaking hands with her guests. "Stuart and Virginia are dressing. I have reserved rooms for you just across the corridors; I will show you to them and you can dress for dinner at once, as we will dine early in order to be on time at the theatre. We have planned to dine here."

To the waiting porter she said, "Please take Mr. and Mrs. Mansfield's things to suite five fifty and five fifty-five," and she led the way to see her guests comfortably settled.

"It is splendid of you to have us, Mrs. Blake," said Marvina. "Its such a treat for us to have an evening in town; we so seldom come, that it is thrilling to see these wonderful electric signs, tall buildings and traffic, and the endless procession of motor cars on every street is truly most remarkable."

"Isn't it?" replied Mrs. Blake. "And it

is all most convenient. The traffic congestion is a source of much worry to the city officials; it seems to be their most difficult problem. If a motor car stops at 42nd street, it holds the traffic up all the way up to 142nd street. For that reason we have to start early when we go down town to the theatre; one can never know just how long it will take to arrive at one's destination."

"Serves you right for living in this roaring mass," said Bruce, smiling as he opened the bags which the porter had placed on a table. "Better build out near us and get out of the traffic; lots of breathing space out there."

"But its lots more comfortable here for me," replied Mrs. Blake. "I have aboslutely no responsibility of housekeeping, and its such a relief."

With a contented sigh and a smile she left them, saying; "As soon as you have dressed, just come over to our living-room; the door will be open."

"Ye Gods, what a woman," said Bruce when she had gone. "The human dreadnought! How can such a big head be so empty; so much waste space!"

"Dad, one does not speak that way of

one's hostess," said Marjory, as she gathered up her things from the open bag and prepared to retire to her own room which was adjoining.

"The poor woman can't help being fat, and I have known many fat people who were very nice and very lovable. Look at Aunt Florence for instance, she is perfectly darling, and all her friends simply adore her!"

This mild rebuke from Marjory amused Marvinna very much. Constant association with her elders had given the child a sort of quiet sophistication that was always a surprise—even to her friends—because with it all she retained every captivating charm of youthful loveliness.

"Yes," replied Bruce, "but your Aunt Florence is a woman with the charm of personality. She is fat because God made her so, and not because she is a silly, selfish, idle glutton, who is fat because of over-indulgence. This woman stuffs herself full of French Pastry and—and ice cream cones," finished Bruce, quite out of breath and looking very disgusted.

At the mention of ice cream cones, Marjory and Marvinna both laughed, and with a knowing little wink at her mother,

Marjorie departed to her own room with her arms full of feminine frills.

III

Three quarters of an hour later the Mansfields entered the living room as requested by the hostess, to find a table in the middle of the room with covers for six people, and the Blake family ready to receive their guests.

After Blake had greeted the Mansfields, Mrs. Blake presented her eldest daughter, Virginia. She came forward demurely, but with a very cordial warm-heartedness in her greeting. She was tall, and had a pensive expression in her wonderful big brown eyes. She was not beautiful, but decidedly attractive in her unaffected girlishness. Her extreme paleness made Marvina think of a flower that loves the sunshine, but has been planted in the shade; sure to grow up tall, spindling and colorless.

Virginia's first smile was for Marjory. The girls seemed to take an instant liking for each other.

Dinner was served at once: two German waiters buzzed about, over-solicitous, as

though expecting an ample tip from the generous host.

The dinner was fairly good, though the hostess was a bit too generous in pressing upon her guests all sorts of dishes, while she explained the plans for the evening.

"We are taking the girls to the theatre with us, but Stuart will fetch them home after the performance and will meet us at the "Rose Bower," a new supper palace; I have never seen anything like it; you will be sure to enjoy it. They have not used a decorator to do it, but a landscape artist, and the syncopated orchestra is wonderful!"

"I am sure I shall be quite overcome, Mrs. Blake," said Marvinna. "Of course Bruce comes into town every day, and the big city is not such a novelty to him, but its been fifteen years since I was obliged to live in New York, and I always feel a bit like a school girl on a picnic when I have the pleasure of one of these outings, though I am sure I would not like it as a steady diet."

IV

Mansfield changed the subject by remarking how successfully the new South American loan was going.

"That was a lucky strike, old man, and now to top it with something bigger!"

Stuart's face lighted up a bit. "Yes, that deal has done great things for us, though I am afraid some of us will have to get out and visit the big cities. Much is lost by not personally covering the enormous outside territory."

"Yes, I have thought of that too. You are right, but who is it to be?"

"Well," replied Stuart, "there is not much to prevent me from going," his eyes roaming about the room.

Marvina looked up quickly as he spoke, thinking she detected a strange note of helpless longing in his voice. For the first time she noticed a decided change, some of the sharp coldness had gone from his eyes; they seemed pathetically dull and shadowy.

There were lines at the corners of his eyes and a pathetic droop to his lips; all this, though expressing depression, yet was softening and not unlovely. One could not help being a little sorry for him.

"We will call a conference and discuss it on Monday, shall we?"

"Surely," said Stuart, "in the meanwhile I will draw up an outline of the plan with a

list of the cities, it will take about six months to do the thing properly."

Dessert was now being served and Mrs. Blake having finished a large dish of cream and an ample slice of cake was filling up the crevices with nuts and raisins.

The girls were chatting together in a low voice, and apparently getting along very well together.

Just as the two men were about to light their cigars, and have a little chat over their coffee, the waiters came in and, at a nod from Mrs. Blake, whisked away the table, dishes and all, leaving the dinner party without a table, and all seated in a circle, not unlike a spiritualistic meeting.

"I am sorry, but we must hurry," said Mrs. Blake; "you know how long it takes to get down through the traffic, Stuart, and we don't want to miss any of the play. Its that new musical play, 'Isle of Dreams,' and they say its perfectly beautiful."

The telephone on the desk rang. Virginia answered. "It's the car, Mother," she announced. There was a hurried rush for wraps and the party was off.

Chapter 9

I

“Isle of Dreams” proved to be a very beautiful play, with excellent music and exquisite scenery.

After the play Mr. and Mrs. Blake, and their party, stood on the sidewalk waiting for their car to come up in the slowly moving procession.

Broadway with its huge electric signs blinking gayly, illuminating the world's gayest thoroughfare, shone down on a conglomeration of swarming humanity, the like of which is to be seen no where in the world except in New York City at the hour when the theatre gives up its crowd, and when from every box, parquet, balcony and proscenium there comes a steady stream of wealth, beauty and gayety to make a midnight revelry.

As they settled down in the comfortable limousine and started slowly up Broadway,

Marvina could not help but marvel at the miracle.

"I simply can't understand where all the people come from or where they go: everything moves, the lights, people and cars; it really makes one's eyes ache."

Velora's eyes sparkled with delight. "Its wonderful! There's nothing like it; I just love Broadway, and especially at this hour," she said.

"Looks like a huge mad-house to me," said Bruce. "I am glad I don't have to see much of it; I love to hear a good concert or see a good play, but to have to mingle with this mad throng spoils it."

"That's just what I love about it; strange how people differ. We are going to meet the Dorseys and the Raymonds at the 'Rose Bower' and make up a party of eight. You are sure to like Mrs. Raymond; she is an English girl, very young and pretty, and a divine dancer."

"Here we are," said Stuart. "Do you think I should see the girls home or will it be all right to let the chauffeur drop them?"

The girls answered before anyone else had a chance to speak. "Please don't bother,

Dad," said Virginia; "we will be perfectly all right."

"Surely we will," agreed Marjory.

The party alighted. Stuart gave directions to the chauffeur, while Velora asked Virginia to order some refreshments to their rooms on their return, and, after the usual good-byes and warnings to be careful, the car slowly moved away and the Blakes and the Mansfields entered the palacial building in which was installed the famous cabaret known as the "Rose Bower."

Over the doorway was a huge arch covered with red roses fashioned of tiny electric lights symbolizing the name.

II

A few moments later the party found themselves in an enchanted garden; no king's palace possessed a larger ballroom. The hundreds of tables resplendent in dainty crystal, glistening silver and snowy white damask, set with buds and blossoms, and shaded lights was both beautiful and elegant.

The entire ceiling of the enormous room was transformed into an oval lattice from which hung climbing rambler roses; between

the buds and green vines one could catch a glimpse of a star-studded sky, all artificial, but so fashioned by the artist that the effect was marvelous.

The head waiter came forward with a bland smile, while his aids stood at attention. He led the way to a little bower in the far end of the room, from which there was a view of the entire picture.

Here Mrs. Blake found her friends waiting and the Mansfields were introduced to the Dorseys and Raymonds. When the party was seated, Stuart walked around the table and lifted a small cloth that covered some mysterious bottles on the corner of the table.

"Which one of you is responsible for these substantial donations?" he inquired as he added three more flasks to the supply from various pockets.

"Raymond brought the Scotch," said Dorsey, "and I am guilty of bootlegging the two bottles of cocktails; send me the doctor's bill," he finished laughing.

The party began chatting gayly. Stuart asked for small glasses and served an excellent cocktail from Mr. Dorsey's bottle.

From the jungle of palms and ferns, which concealed a murmuring waterfall, came the

muffled sound of saxaphones, trombones, and other instruments that make up a modern syncopated orchestra.

Another moment, and there came floating down the beautiful room under the diffused glow of kindly lights, an array of pretty girls and gallant cavaliers, dancing to the weird, plaintive, long drawn notes which actually seemed to have a mesmeric appeal to their very souls; such undulating, slinky sliding harmony, it would be difficult to imagine.

The Blake party began to dance. Bruce glided off with the willowy Mrs. Raymond; Mr. Raymond danced with Mrs. Dorsey; Stuart asked Marvinna to dance, but she pleaded weariness and said that she preferred to look on; Mr. Dorsey asked Velora to dance and nearly collapsed when she consented. She started down the long room with a labored role, resembling a storm-tossed dreadnought on the high seas.

It was too much for Marvinna's sense of humor; she could not help laughing, but then bit her lips as she realized that Stuart was watching her.

III

"Have you ever heard such tantalizing, teasing music?" asked Marvinna, "and seen so many beautiful women? Look at that dark-eyed dainty little creature at the second table, Mr. Blake; the one in the blue and gold brocade; isn't she beautiful? Why, she can't be much older than Marjory!"

Stuart turned his head slightly and saw a beautiful girl in all the rosebud charm of her youth; winsome, bewitching and wine-flushed. Not a woman present but envied her brilliant wit and charm; not a man who did not gaze in profound admiration.

The waiter filled her glass and she clinked it with her companion's and drained it to the last drop. The man looked at her with undisguised admiration in which was blended that bestial desire for her body; the thirst of the human vampire . . .

Stuart smiled his painful smile; more painful than ever Marvinna thought.

"That's what makes me sick about these places; we see so many of them, not yet wholly wrecked and still in sight of shore, but with never a helping hand! She finds

plenty of willing escorts to hell," he said bitterly, "and it won't be long before that poor little thing will be cast up by the waves!"

Just then the music stopped and the dancers came back, Dorsey mopping his face and Velora puffing like a porpoise.

"Whatever have you two been talking about?" she inquired looking from Marvinna to Stuart. "You look like a crepe hanger, Stuart." Without waiting for an answer she continued, "what do you think of this place, Mrs. Mansfield, isn't it glorious?"

"It is truly very wonderful; never have I seen so much artificial beauty!"

"These are the rendezvous in which your tired business men relax, my dear! Look at them; the place is filled with them: they come here thinking they won't be seen. They remind me of an ostrich with his head in the sand. Look about and see how many you recognize from Oak Dale!"

"That is unkind, Mrs. Blake," said Bruce, "you include all tired business men in that statement, and that is not true. I never frequent these places, and I don't imagine your husband does either, except when you accompany him!"

Marvina nudged Bruce under the table to warn him.

"There are exceptions to every rule of course," said Velora.

IV

The second course was being served, the glasses were refilled, and Mr. Raymond began a story.

Marvina gazed about the room in utter amazement. In the little balconies which gave a strange semblance of seclusion, bald-headed Romeos leaned across little tables toward their Juliets; glasses tinkled merrily as the bottles on the tables became empty and were discarded.

Was Velora partly right? Was this the playground of the tired New York business man?

Slowly and stealthily the strains of a fox-trot came floating in from behind the jungle.

Among the seductive harmony of silken skirts and voices ripe with laughter, and glad greeting, mingled the merry dancers.

"It seems true after all," thought Marvina, "and I wonder if it is really so wrong, so long as they play fair!"

There they were—no mistake about it—those tired business men, just boys again—delightful, happy, laughing boys, stepping it right merrily, worshipping at the shrine of wine, woman, and song.

Suddenly Marvinna started and bit her lip. Whirling past, with an arm full of rose fluff and blonde tresses, was Willard Hanley, a neighbor of the Mansfields at Oak Dale. She looked over quickly at Bruce, but he had not seen him, he was busily engaged in listening to a story from Mrs. Raymond. Glad that Bruce had not seen, she followed Hanley with her eyes He had seen her, but somehow he knew intuitively that she would not tell.

Ethel Hanley was one of Marvinna's dearest friends. She was a sweet little mother and a loyal wife; her husband was always kind and devoted to her.

Thinking of the two women, the beautiful little Broadway butterfly floating over the ballroom floor with Willard Hanley and his charming little wife, protected and happy in her quiet lovely home, provided for by the father of her children whose slumbers she guarded as they dreamed happy dreams by her side—Marvinna could not help being

sorry for the poor little butterfly enveiled in the sensual incense of unbridled mirth. . . just a moth flitting about the soul consuming candle.

Out in the fresh air . . . "God, but its good to breathe the fresh ozone once more," whispered Marvinna to Bruce, "and I say dear won't it be good to be home again?"

Chapter 10

I

Christmas brought a gay throng of youngsters to "Awari." It had always been the children's time. Barrels of holly with its crimson berries, crates of mistletoe and evergreens had been shipped up from the old homestead in the Southland.

The house was a forest of sweet smelling ferns, spicy pine and brilliant color. A big log fire sparkled and crackled in the huge fireplace.

Outside the beautiful rolling hills were covered with pure white snow, and crowned with crystal trees which glittered and sparkled in the sunshine—like a fairy forest of priceless gems; over all hung a turquoise sky of tenderest blue.

The lake was frozen and smooth—like a sheet of silver; over its smooth surface glided the merry skaters, their eyes gleaming, their cheeks flushed with the rosy glow of health.

"Surely this is ideal Christmas weather," said Bruce, as he picked up his skates and started out; "those youngsters think they can skate; just watch me," and with his boyish smile he stalked off toward the lake. "Aren't you coming out?" he called back to Marvina.

"Now, my dear," she replied, "how am I to go out when I have fifteen youngsters to feed and lodge?"

The wintry sun slowly glided down between the earth and sky, a red ball of flame dyeing the snow-covered hills a deep rose, and flooding the crystal forests with a thousand rainbow hues.

The sound of youth's joyous laughter came floating through the frosty air to herald the approach of merry revellers: Bruce Mansfield, Jr., Douglas Deane, his classmate at college, Marjory, Virginia Blake, Doris Lee, Curtis Clayton and a dozen others.

"How long before dinner, Mother?" called Bruce, Jr., "we are about famished."

"Your normal state," answered his mother with a laugh; "we are going to dine at six, because afterwards we have to trim the tree—two trees in fact—one in the

music room and the big tree in the drawing room; so don't dress for dinner. All of you go to your rooms and just tidy up a bit."

The boys and girls deposited their skates and outer garments in the big closet in the entrance hall, and went trooping up to their rooms in a whirl of laughter and gay chatter.

II

After dinner the servants brought in two step ladders and a dozen boxes of ornaments and the process of trimming the trees began. The boys stood on the ladders, tying on the big shiny balls, draping the silver rain and gayly-colored lights, while the girls unpacked and handed them up.

The girls were flying about, tying clusters of mistletoe under the chandelier at the entrance to the dining-room and over the stairway, and arranging a wreath of holly here and a garland of pine there.

Bruce, Jr.—called "Junior" by his family and friends—turned on the radio, tuned in for the orchestra at the Commodore Hotel, and, as the music from the air suddenly filled the room, Junior unceremoniously, clasped Virginia Blake in his arms and whirled down

the room; Douglas Deane followed with Marjory, and half a dozen others stopped the decorating to finish the foxtrot.

One of the girls, who was making a yard around the tree, fashioned with artificial grass and a miniature picket fence, threw a quick glance in the direction of Douglas and Marjory.

"Doug certainly is crazy about Marjory. He has been courting her for two years; he graduated this spring, and I shouldn't be a bit surprised if we aren't going to have an announcement before the Christmas house-party breaks up!"

"That would be wonderful," replied her companion. "I do hope Marjory will ask me to be a bridesmaid; I was her room-mate at boarding school."

"Isn't her brother good looking? He seems to be quite smitten with that New York girl he is dancing with, though I am quite sure I don't know what the attraction is; she is a quiet, colorless little thing; no pep at all."

Just then the music stopped and the dancers stood about the tree.

"Let's finish the job and get all this junk out of the way," said Junior, "then we can

move the furniture back and take up the rugs and have a real dance!"

He mounted the ladder with an arm full of tinsel garlands and began to drape them about the tree. Two or three others were tying ornaments on the lower branches, and several boys and girls were gathering up the empty boxes and waste.

"Throw them into the cellar, boys," called Junior, "There we are." He switched on the lights and the big tree instantly became a thing of illuminated beauty. He descended and removed the ladder: there was a gasp of admiration.

"Now, on with the dance," he said, as he shouldered the ladder and started toward the cellar.

"Where are Mr. and Mrs. Mansfield?" asked Virginia, as she helped Marjory remove some holly leaves and pine branches which had fallen on the window seat.

"Ah," said Marjory, "Mother and Dad are always closeted with Santa Claus on 'Christmas Eve. There are always last minute packages to be wrapped, and last moment plans to be made: they get loads of fun out of this."

III

At eleven thirty Mr. and Mrs. Mansfield came down to join the youngsters.

"If you expect to be up in time for dinner tomorrow," said Marvinna, "you had better be going to bed. Every one of you should be in bed before twelve, because we have an informal dinner at one o'clock tomorrow and you will be dancing late tomorrow night; besides, you have to give Santa Claus a chance, you know!"

"Santa Claus indeed; better give a man a little quiet rest in his own house," said Bruce with a pretense of grouchiness.

The boys and girls stopped dancing rather reluctantly, and said goodnight to their hostess and host. Marjory and Junior stayed until the last, to see if there was anything they could do to help in the final arrangements.

Finally the house was quiet. In the stillness Bruce and Marvinna banked pyramids of gifts under the Christmas tree; an attractive present for everyone. Then they stood hand in hand to admire the beautiful

tree with all the gay packages in holly ribbon and pretty cards.

"Do you remember the first Christmas tree, dear, when Junior was only a few months old? We had lots of fun trimming it in our little flat in London."

Marvina looked up into his face, there were tears in her beautiful eyes, but they were tears of joy. "It seems only a little while ago, Bruce dear. The Gods have been good to us."

Chapter 11

I

Christmas day came with all its gaiety and the evening brought the community's younger set to "Awari;" a dazzling bevy of youth and beauty—boys and girls from sixteen to twenty-two.

Bruce and Marvinna mingled with the gay youngsters, happy in their gladness and rejoicing.

"Bruce dear, have you noticed little Virginia Blake? She looks quite transformed. There is a new light in her eyes; she seems to reflect all the happiness about her; she is positively pretty."

He looked across the room and saw Junior smiling down into the laughing eyes of Virginia.

"Strange, what environment will do," he said, "I didn't know the child could laugh. By the way, that would be rather an ideal match, dear; I am the only member of the

firm who boasts of a son. Someone must carry on, and she is a fine sensible girl."

"Bruce, you are a schemer," laughed Marvinna, "besides the children are too young to be thinking seriously of such things."

"Same age you and I were, dear, when we became partners and pals for life."

Martin announced Mr. and Mrs. Roland and Miss Roland. Marvinna hastened to greet these old friends and their daughter, who had motored over from Mapleton.

The music began, and at the first note the voices and ripple of laughter softened and each youth with a girl swayed to the fascinating rhythm of the music as they went gliding down the long room under a bower of Christmas green.

"What a lovely picture they make," thought Marvinna, as she viewed the scene with pride, "how beautiful is youth at home; how beautiful the girls look in their pretty frocks of soft tulle and fluffy lace."

Some boys who had motored over from a nearby town came in and Junior brought them over to be introduced to his Mother and Dad. After the introductions Junior inquired, "Have you seen Marjory, Mother? I want the boys to meet her."

"I saw her dancing with Douglas a moment ago. You take the boys to the cloak room, and I will try to find her for you."

Marvina wound her way through the crowd of merry dancers to the spacious solarium; in a far corner under a huge palm she got a glimpse of Marjory. She looked like the very personification of lovely girlhood in her dance frock of snowy white lace with its cluster of rosebuds at the waist.

Douglas Deane was seated by her side in earnest conversation. Marvina smiled as she gazed on the age-old picture of young lovers.

"Junior will have to wait; I would not disturb them for the world," thought Marvina as she smilingly turned away.

II

Douglas Deane was the kind of a boy a girl couldn't help liking; strong, magnetic, good-humored and exceptionally good-looking. He had led Marjory to the secluded seat under the palm, to tell her something he had longed to tell her for more than a year.

"Marjory," he began slowly, "you must know that I love you: I have loved you ever since the first day I met you."

Marjory blushed and smiled up at him,

"I most certainly knew nothing of the sort," she said, "and besides you don't have to make love to me just because we have been pals for so long, and because you are a fraternity brother of Junior."

"Please don't say that, Marjory dear; I love you, because you are the most adorable girl in the world and I want you to be my little pal always. Won't you, Marjory?"

"We are too young to think of marrying Doug; why, you aren't out of college yet and"

Douglas seized her hand and pressed it tenderly, as he looked longingly into her blue eyes. . . .

"Don't tease me, please, dear. I have waited just as long as I can. Tell me that you love me, that you will marry me," he cried passionately, "you are glorious, you are wonderful, you will inspire me to do big things. Let us set out together in the morning of Life and climb the heights together, dear."

She looked into his eyes, her voice trembled slightly . . . "I love you, dear. I think I have always loved you, and perhaps you are right . . . the morning of

Life may be the best time to start our life's journey together."

"And you'll marry me?"

"Yes," she whispered softly.

Douglas drew her suddenly into his arms and kissed her: "You are an angel, Marjory, and I am going to worship you!"

She returned his earnest look with a smile and answered slowly: "not an angel, but the happiest girl in the world; which I think is much better."

"I am graduating in the spring and Dad is going to take me in with him as a department manager at first; then there will be a partnership later. Can't we be married in June?"

For a long time they sat hand in hand, talking, laughing, dreaming and planning for the future.

Chapter 12

I

April, the light and shadow month, came to awaken the earth from its winter sleep. The second of April was one of those sunny days when the warm sun rays kiss away the last bit of frost from the earth and calls the spring flowers from their winter slumbers.

Mary Langford, who came every Wednesday to give Marjory a music lesson, was walking in the garden with Marvina after having finished.

"Your garden is beautiful, Mrs. Mansfield," she said; "I never cease to marvel at the miracle of Spring, and you have so many of the spring flowers of which I am most fond. Perhaps you will exchange some roots and bulbs with me? I have some very wonderful dahlias and chrysanthemums which I will bring over, and I would like to have a clump of those snowdrops if you could spare them."

Stooping over to lift the moist sod from

a cluster of dark green snowdrops, which were lifting their heads slowly from their winter couch, Marvinna cut out a square of the sod containing several roots of the delicate spring flower.

"There you are," she said, smiling up at Mary: "If you take them home and plant them at once they will never know they have been moved, and it really does them good to be thinned out. I will come over and get some of your dahlias and chrysanthemums some day. Thanks very much. Its such a joy to get out into the garden with my trowel and rake and scratch about when spring comes; I just love it."

"So do I," replied Mary: "it's so wonderful to find the pale green tips of the daffodils breaking their way through the snow, but it's more beautiful and interesting to watch April clean house. With her showers she washes the old earth clean, using the wind for a broom, and her warm sunshine to dry and bleach."

"Marjory and I were watching the ice disappear from the lake today; it began to thaw at the upper end, and as it broke up, the wind caught and swept it away; in a few hours the lake was a ripple of clear blue

water . . . She may be shadowy and fickle, this Lady April, but she is a good house-wife. With her wind brooms she sweeps the forests and hills . . . Have you seen her tackle a pile of dead leaves where they have lain all winter and disperse them in a moment?"

"I have never heard it put that way before," said Marvina, "but it is a very beautiful thought, Mary, and I do love the way April dresses up her nature house. The new carpet of emerald green loveliness: the curtains of delicate green foliage against the blue canopy of the sky; the white, gold and rose of the fragrant spring blossoms; the first warble of the bluebird; it's really good to be alive in April."

Just then Martin came hurriedly across the garden.

"Pardon, Madame, there is a phone call for Miss Langford. It's Miss Langford's maid, and she said she would like to speak to her mistress; that the message was most important."

Mary turned a little pale as she hurried across the garden to the telephone, followed by Marvina.

"Come home as quickly as you can,

Miss Mary; your father has had a stroke. I have telephoned for the doctor. Please hurry Miss, I'm afraid he is very bad."

"I will come at once," answered Mary in a trembling voice. She hung up the receiver and turned to Marvina to tell her the distressing news.

"Father has not been well for some time; he is nearly eighty years old and I am afraid his condition is very grave."

"Just a moment," said Marvina, "I will get the car out and Marjory and I will go home with you. There may be something we can do."

II

The doctor's car was at the door when Marvina drove up. Mary rushed into the house, followed by Marvina and Marjory.

In the quaint old-fashioned living room the doctor, who was an old friend and devoted admirer of Mary's, came forward to greet her. One look at his face told the story.

"He just passed away quietly, without pain, Mary. I am sorry, I could do nothing."

A smothered sob escaped from Mary's white lips.

"He was all I had in the world; the last home tie is broken."

Desolate tears trickled down her colorless face.

Marvina led the weeping girl to an old fashioned settee and groped about for some consoling words; her lips trembled as she looked upon the beautiful distressed face of her friend.

"Don't worry, Mary dear," she said, "you know that the event we call 'Death,' is only the beginning of the great adventure; the realization of something far more beautiful than anything we have ever known. I don't believe it is good to grieve."

Marjory brought a glass of cool water from the spring which Mary accepted as she smiled through her tears; then, addressing the doctor she said: "I should like to go to him now, Dick."

Ever since childhood, Mary had called Dr. Richard Wayne "Dick," and the doctor had spent many years in vain effort to make Mary Mrs. Dr. Dick, as he had been called since he came from college twenty-two years ago and started practicing at Valley View.

Dr. Dick led the way silently.

“Marjory dear, will you take the car home and tell Dad what has happened? I will stay with Mary and will telephone later, though I don’t think I will leave Mary at all. I think I will stay until after the funeral; then I will take the poor girl home with me!”

Marjory, two big glistening tears in her beautiful blue eyes, kissed her friend and teacher: “I am so sorry, Mary,” was all she could say. “Be sure to phone me if you need me, Mother dear.”

Marvina remained in the living room. As she began to tidy up things, she could hear Mary softly sobbing, as she spoke in low tones to the doctor . . .

“How strange is the world, Dick. When I left the house only a few hours ago, father was out, digging around the flowers and raking the leaves. He smiled goodbye as I went out. How little I knew, that it would be the last time I should see that dear old smiling face,” she said through a fresh shower of tears.

“There, there, Mary, please don’t take on so; you will make yourself ill, and I shall have another patient on my hands. Now you must brace up and be the strong, self

reliant girl I have always known you to be. Now, shall I take the responsibility of arrangements off your hands? I will gladly do so."

Mary accepted his kind offer with much gratitude.

"Thank you so much, Dick. I would not know what to do, and besides, I don't seem to be able to think clearly; this has come so suddenly."

He led her back downstairs. For the first time Mary remembered that Mrs. Mansfield and Dick had not been introduced; after the introduction the doctor explained that he would take charge of the obsequies, so as to relieve Miss Langford of the responsibility, and that he would hurry downtown and attend to the preliminaries at once.

IV

The two women left alone, Mary, without reserve, poured out all that was in her heart.

"You are wonderfully kind, Mrs. Mansfield; I am sorry I am so weak, but the blow was much stronger than I was prepared for, and I feel so terribly alone. I have no other relatives at all, and my father was so good;

the best man that ever lived; always so kind-hearted, so gentle and sympathetic."

"And how about Dr. Wayne? He seems to be also gentle and sympathetic; he looked at you with his whole soul in his eyes, expressing a world of love and sympathy."

"Yes, I know; he has always been like sunshine breaking through the clouds in my life, and yet, I have only been able to love him as a dear brother and comrade!"

"Now, you are not going to talk any more, I am going to ask Julia to bring you a nice cup of tea and you are going to rest. The next two days are going to be very trying ones, and you will need all of your strength."

"After that I am going to take you home with me. We love the same things, have much in common, and are sure to be congenial, and Marjory will be leaving us in June for a home of her own, so then I shall need consoling company."

Mary's heart was too full to answer, but there was a world of love and gratitude in her tear-filled eyes.

Chapter 13

I

The fourth of June was a glorious day. Nature had been busy for weeks. Marvina had watched its handiwork. The fields and road-sides had melted into seas and lanes of living beauty, which had developed with each day a manifest of eternal love and awakened life.

After breakfast Marvina put her arm about Marjory's waist and said: "Come, dear, let us walk in the garden. The Los Angeles rose-tree has given birth to three beauties and you must see them."

Marjory smiled up at her Mother: "Yes, I saw them last evening. Doug and I were down there, but they were only half blown; I suppose they are full blown by this time. The color of them is the most beautiful I have ever seen."

Mother and daughter went forth, arm in arm, into the garden where flowers and gorgeous foliage of trees, vines and shrubs

created a divine splendor of lavish luxury, which seemed a marvelous miracle.

What is more beautiful than a day in June?

The rose bushes were heavy with fragrance, and the blue rippling lake danced for joy in the sunshine. Mr. Wren was perching in a nearby tree singing a song of love to Jenny Wren, as she covered the three young hopefuls in the little Wren house among the tangled vines of wisteria.

Marvina had much to say to Marjory on this perfect June day, though it was very difficult to begin. There are times when the heart is so full of gladness and sadness that the lips refuse to voice its emotion.

"There is an ideal example of domestic bliss," said Marvina, as she pointed to Mr. Wren saucily singing straight at them, and Jenny Wren peeping inquiringly out of her house.

"Isn't it darling? He does sing a glad song of joy and pride, doesn't he?" said Marjory. "Come out on the peninsula Mother; Mrs. Robin has built her nest inside the rustic summer house, and has three of the darlinest babies."

Out in the summer house Marjory

climbed up on the seat that stretched along the side, and pointed out the nest to her mother. Instantly three little heads were lifted on slender necks and three enormous mouths opened wide. From a distant bough Mother and Father Robin scolded . . .

“Ah, they are hungry, Mother,” said Marjory, “I wish I knew what to give them.”

“Their mother understands their diet better than we do,” answered Marvina, “and we are distressing her, let’s go away and leave her in her maternal happiness.”

II

“June is truly a wonderful month, isn’t it, Mother?” There was a little thrill of gladness in Marjory’s voice as she spoke.

“It is,” replied Marvina, “and my little girl is going to be married tomorrow. ’Tis the month of love and beauty and marriage; and it is not as fashion decrees it—this custom of bridal wreaths in June—but as God intended. It is the higher law of universal sex instinct which rules the world, including men and women, birds and beasts. All nature awakes at the call of June.”

“The birds know—all life in June

quicken and throb with desire as God intended, in plants as in animals—the blossom is the instinct, and of love is born the color and fragrance.”

They had reached the terrace steps and Marvinna plucked one of the beautiful roses and gave it to Marjory.

“It is like yourself, my dear, full of wondrous beauty and infinite charm.”

“You are a perfect darling, mother, to say such pretty things, and truly I don’t know what I shall do without you,” and she cuddled up close to Marvinna’s side as she seated herself on the garden bench.

“It is easy enough to say pretty things, my dear; it is the cold practical things that are difficult to say, and no matter how difficult they are, I am going to say them to you mixed with the beautiful things, because I feel that they will help my little girl along Life’s way, which can’t and won’t be all rose strewn.”

“It seems only yesterday that you were my bonnie blue-eyed baby. Do you remember, after you had the measles which left you with that nasty earache? How Mother sat up all night holding a hot water bottle to your ear, so that your slumbers in

her arms would not be disturbed by pain?"

"And now you are going out into the world to obey that law, which everywhere God's creatures are obeying—that nature law—without which this beautiful earth so full of happiness and pregnant with promise, would be a barren waste. It would be a good idea to take a lesson in domesticity from Mrs. Robin and Mrs. Wren."

"When you place your hand in his and set out together across the smiling fields which beckon you with tomorrow's sun, know that you have accepted a splendid responsibility and keep duty well in sight. You love him and want to make him happy—and I will tell you how."

"With your loyal love, the problem is more than half solved, but don't begin by thinking wrongly, as so many do and have done. Love, my dear, is absolutely essential; it is the only sure anchor of married life; the only safeguard against rough weather which is sure to come mingled with the sunshine, but love must be backed with a great many other qualities, including forbearance and intuitive discretion; else its effort and self-sacrifice will be labor lost."

"Love is an excellent and necessary

foundation on which to build your matrimonial happiness, but to live a successful and harmonious married life, man and wife must have more than love,—try a little horse sense, you will find it works wonders.”

“Now, you believe him to be a demi-god and I don’t want to spoil your girlish dream; I am sure he will swear that you are an angel, and he is of course likewise mistaken, but out of your dreams will—I hope—come a wonderful reality. So tuck away in a pigeon hole of your memory for future use Mother’s practical advice, dear.”

“These dream visions always fade away ere the honeymoon is over, and when your will-o’-the-wisp ideals have fled be prepared to face life as it really is and be glad that you have had your dream-ideals; life would be empty without them. And when you find that your demi-god is mere mortal man, be glad that he is noble and true, as I am sure he will be.”

“Remember, that God has wisely planned and that it is well to expect perfection though it be impossible. Remember, that to be an ideal wife is a most difficult task. The ideal wife must be a personality as complex as the mind of man; she must see that the Golden

Rule is practised and mutually applied. Establish the law of give and take, and make the flowers bloom all along the way."

"Remember, that the daily grind must have its recompense: give him an occasional evening out if he cares about it, and don't spoil your consent with a reluctant scowl and take all the pleasure out of it. Pettiness and nagging are two of the greatest matrimonial crimes; if you are annoyed say so, but don't sing it. Never admit even to yourself that there could be any other woman; you have his heart, keep it."

"Remember, that careless indifference and sexual matter-of-course is the road to the divorce court, and if you forget to be his sweetheart as well as his wife you may have much to forgive. We must all obey the law of existence which is born of love—the mother of desire. Love without desire is mere shrieking sham and shameless hypocrisy. Don't try to understand this mysterious force, this creative power that is supreme and rules the Universe, and which we know as 'Love;' 'tis a gift from God, accept it with a glad heart."

III

“Don’t forget whom your husband married, dear; a neat, cleanly, well-groomed girl; gracious, soft-voiced and smiling; to be grouchy, slovenly and untidy are grievous sins. Don’t lose your figure; remember that indifference to appearance is deadly. This does not mean that you must retain an absurd figure through starvation! If you find yourself growing plump eliminate fattening foods, and don’t wait until you are fat before you take these precautions.”

“Make yourself as attractive as you can, but try to always understand what attractiveness is, and never be influenced in becoming one of those restless, half-starved, plucked eye-browed, rouged, whitened and jazz-crazed creatures, who insult the sacred barge of Motherhood and desecrate the home.”

“You will promise to obey, but every man is a big baby at heart, and with a reasonable amount of patience and tact you will be able to establish a fifty-fifty comradeship without wearing the pants or tying him to your apron strings.) Churches are good,

and clubs are all right if not overdone, but remember, that your first obligation is your home, your husband and children."

"Don't ever believe in that method of winning his heart through his stomach; that may appeal when applied to a hog, but I prefer to believe in Omar's theory of, 'A jug of wine, a loaf of bread and Thou.' Of course, he may like a steak and a few potatoes, and this may be garnished with kisses, but don't try to love him to death."

"My dear, don't listen to all that bosh about birth control. If the mothers of Abraham Lincoln, Mary Baker Eddy and other great men and women, had believed in birth control, the world would have been robbed of its greatest treasures.

"Remember, that on woman is bestowed the greatest of all honors, that of Mothering the world. Birth control may be all right under certain conditions, but its place is certainly not in the decent homes of healthy men and women."

"Make motherhood a joy for both yourself and your children. Teach them that Home is the most wonderful place, that Father is the finest man in the world and a loyal friend, to be loved and respected, and

that Mother is a precious possession to be cherished and cared for, that she may get much happiness from the home to which she gives her all!"

"So, my little girl, that's quite a lecture, and I have not been given much to lecturing. However, I feel better now, because I feel that, if you remember, you will understand how to cope with each problem as it presents itself; your common sense and experience as it comes to you will do the rest."

"And now, dear, let's smile again; no more seriousness for today; it's the time of brides and roses, of love and laughter."

IV

Marjory had been very quiet and thoughtful while listening silently to her mother.

"If I can make a home as pleasant as you have made this dear old spot, I shall become a truly good wife and Mother. I do not now understand quite all you have said, though I dare say understanding can only come with experience. I thank you, mother dear, and I shall long remember this hour here among the roses with you, and all that you have said."

Marvina rose and spoke: "Now we must go in and arrange all the lacy finery, and

finish packing the trunks that are to be sent to the station. You must retire early and rest. We don't want to see a tired, pale little bride, but a radiant, fresh fairy of loveliness."

There was just a suspicion of tears in Marvina's voice; she leaned forward and kissed Marjory, and then they started back through the beautiful garden.

At the top of the terrace they saw a little brown roadster turn into the driveway, and Marjory's face lit up. She blushed prettily and her eyes sparkled as she turned to her mother and cried, "There's Doug," and was off like the wind.

"Beauty calling Youth from Love's mountain top," thought Marvina, as she was left alone. She turned slowly toward her room garden to walk in thoughtful solitude among its riot of color and sweet perfume . . .

Chapter 14

I

Since the day they laid Henry Langford to rest in the family plot on the hillside at Valley View, Mary had been staying at "Awari." She had been a real treasure in helping with Marjory's trousseau, and assisting with all the arrangements for the wedding.

These interests had helped her forget her bereavement a little, though there was a pathetic droop to her mouth, and her big hazel eyes had lost the smile that had always lurked there; they were sad and dreamy. She looked very slender and pale in her black dress, which made her appear more ethereal and saint-like than before.

Her soft silvery hair seemed to form a halo for her beautiful pensive face, and about her whole being there hovered a glamor of romance and mystery.

"Mary is adorably beautiful, don't you think so?" cried Marvina to Marjory. Mar-

jory followed her mother's gaze and saw Mary coming slowly across the garden with a basket of spring flowers on her arm.

"I have thought her beautiful ever since the first moment I saw her," replied Marjory, "but somehow she is more charming now than ever before; perhaps the black is more becoming than the colors we are accustomed to see her wear. I think it is very strange that she has never married."

"It is a great pity she has never married," answered Marvina: "She is just the sort of woman who would make a wonderful wife and mother, and a home with all the beauty and charm which a home should have; still, it is not too late, she may marry yet."

"Do you think so mother?" Marjory's eyes sparkled, "do you think she will marry Dr. Dick? He is crazy about her, and he is so nice. I wish she would marry him."

"It may be that Mary is one of those unfortunate creatures who can love only once, and it isn't Dr. Dick. Mary is a most unusual woman, born with a beautiful soul; the heart-break of life which harden some has softened her and made even more beautiful her soul. That is what we see in her lovely face; not just the beauty of her fea-

tures, her lovely hair and pretty teeth, but the ethereal grace and daintiness; the intangible yet ever-compelling charm, reflected by a beautiful soul."

"Since she has been with us, I have studied her characteristics and find her more interesting every day. She is responsive in intelligent and instinctive sympathy."

"She has an interpretive and suggestive mentality, attuned to a sense of telepathy; the fineness of thought and delicacy of feeling which accompanies a gentle passion that must appeal. It is these things, after all, that go to make up the really beautiful woman; not the jointed talking dolls with just pretty faces."

II

A week had passed since this conversation had taken place between Marjory and her mother.

Now that the excitement of the wedding was over, and things were settling down to the normal again, never had Marvina appreciated a friend as she did Mary at this time.

Her quick sympathy and understanding when she would find the mother in her

daughter's empty room . . . Once she found her fondling a tiny baby shoe as she smiled through tears at a picture of Marjorie at two years of age.

"Now, if you have the other one," said Mary, touching the tiny shoe lightly, "you might keep them for your grandson."

Marvina looked into those big sad eyes, into which there had come first a teasing little twinkle, followed by a deeply tender sympathy.

"I don't care how soon I become a grandmother," replied Marvina, smiling and drying the tears which still glistened in her pretty eyes.

"I love children, and I wish I had a large family. I—I'm afraid, I shall miss them terribly, Mary dear: I'm so glad to have you with me; you are always so cheering."

"Now, you should not have one single sad moment," said Mary; "they will be back home for the fourth of July, and that's only a few weeks off. Come up to the music room and I will sing to you some glad sweet song that will chase away all the shadows."

She did . . . She was that kind, always chasing the shadows and spreading

sunshine: making the flowers bloom all
along Life's way.

Chapter 15

I

The fourth of July had always been a day of joyous celebration at "Awari" and this was to be a more glorious day—more joyful than all the others.

Marjory and Douglas were coming home from their wedding trip; Junior was to be in all the games at the Country Club—swimming, tennis and rowing. The ball game in the morning and a golf tournament in the afternoon were claiming much enthusiasm from Bruce.

The Blakes were to motor out early in the morning and bring the children. Virginia to spend a month at "Awari," and Velora was to continue her trip by motor to Cape May on July fifth, taking her baby and nurse, to spend the month at the seaside.

Stuart Blake had been away for six months visiting the big cities both in the United States and Canada, establishing offices in Philadelphia, Baltimore, Pittsburg,

Chicago and San Francisco. He was to arrive in New York on July third and motor out with his family to join the gay celebration at "Awari."

For several days Marvinna and Mary rushed about planning and arranging the rooms, and making the home attractive and comfortable to receive the guests.

Then came the dawn of the birthday of America's independence. Marvinna was restless and excited; she could hardly tell why. Four o'clock in the morning found her wide awake, thinking over the coming events of the day.

The first thought which came to her awakened mind was that Marjory would be home that day; that was followed by the thought, "and she is a wife, she, who only yesterday was my baby girl; and I suppose Junior will be going next. I wonder what she will be like, the new daughter our son will bring to us." . . . Then, the lovely brown eyes and serious face of Virginia Blake rose before her.

As she lay there, thinking quietly, the note of a bird from its bed of leafy boughs down in the forest came floating through the open windows. In a few moments, an-

other feathered songster joined in, making a duet: then another and another, until the feathered symphony of the forest was complete, greeting the dawn with all its glad music.

The dainty white curtains fluttered softly in the breeze, as the rosy dawn came peeping through the window in all its glowing beauty, fresh from its Maker.

Marvina rose and threw on her dressing gown, slipped her feet into her comfies, threw open the French windows and stepped out on the balcony to greet the glad day.

From the flag-pole in the garden, majestically waving in the morning breeze, was Old Glory. With the rising sun shining full on its beautiful stars and stripes the sight of this old flag never failed to give her a thrill of pride, and this morning it looked more beautiful than ever as it proudly moved in the sunlight.

Marvina was a woman who got much more happiness than most people out of the things she loved; her home, her worship of God, her patriotism, her joy of living and passion for beauty in all things.

" 'Tis truly the month of sunshine," she thought, as she leaned on the balcony rail

and gazed on all the early morning loveliness. "Surely, this is the time to drink in the first glad joys of the beauty-filled day."

From the first bird song greeting the rosy dawn until the world was a flame of light she gazed about. From every neighboring housetop, from windows and flag poles fluttered flags, pennants and ribbons. Around the lake were stretched rows of gay lanterns for the Lantern Fete that night. A huge float occupied the center of the lake; from this the fireworks would be set off.

Suddenly—"Good morning, Juliet," came from the direction of the lake, "aren't you up rather early?"

Marvina's eyes followed the sound of a boyish laugh, and saw Junior jump from his canoe, pull it up on the shore and come toward the house.

"What's the matter, mother?" he inquired, as he came up near the balcony, "are you ill?" "Can I get you anything?"

"No, thank you, dear; I am quite all right, only I couldn't sleep any longer, for some reason or other; but what are you doing up so early?"

"Same trouble," laughed Junior, "so I thought I would take a workout around the

lake, and be in better shape for the canoe races. Now I am on my way to raid the ice-box."

Marvina gazed with much pride and joy on this modern Hercules in his bathing suit, his broad shoulders rising above a muscular chest. The college athlete stood straight and strong, like some sturdy forest oak. Twenty-one and a tall, powerful, gentlemanly fellow. His outlook on Life's winding way was gloriously promising.

"What could be more wonderful?" thought Marvina, "than to be twenty-one, strong and healthy, facing Life with the philosophy of sunshine in one's soul?"

She returned to her room and began to dress. Soon she could hear the hum of life about the house, as the servants were busy with the morning's work.

II

At seven-thirty the family met on the breakfast porch.

"I thought it best to get breakfast over early," said Marvina, "because the guests will be arriving early, as the sports start at the club house about nine-thirty."

"Everybody seemed to be up and hungry anyway," said Bruce. "By the way dear, I forgot to tell you that we had a telegram from Blake saying that he had missed connections at Chicago, which would make him a day late; he was to have arrived yesterday."

"That's too bad," answered Marvina, "don't you think he will get into New York in time to come out today?"

"I think perhaps he will, but it may be quite late."

"If he gets into New York on time he can take the Hudson tube to Newark, and I can take the sportster to fetch him," suggested Junior.

"That would be about the only way for him to get here with any comfort," replied his father; "the train crush is terrible on one of these summer holidays."

"Come Mary, we will gather the red and white carnations and blue corn-flowers, to fashion the flag in the center of the dining room table," said Marvina, as they finished breakfast.

Just then the telephone rang, and Martin came to deliver the message he received over the phone.

"A message from Mrs. Blake, madam, saying Mr. Blake has not returned as yet, so she is starting at once without him, and should arrive with the children about nine-thirty."

"Thank you, Martin," and turning to Bruce she said; "Mrs. Blake evidently means to make good time; its eight-thirty now and she has to get through New York and over the ferry, and you know what the traffic is like on days like this."

"Blake tells me his chaffeur is rather a reckless driver," replied Bruce, "he has been arrested several times for speeding; I am surprised that he has not discharged him long ago."

Marvina and Mary departed, to gather the flowers, and Bruce and Junior seated themselves again at the table, lit their cigarettes and began to discuss the day's races.

In the meantime, Velora, in her high-powered touring car, was speeding along. She sat in the front seat, with her two children in the back seat, watching with tense, strained nerves as they shot in and out among the procession of holiday tourists.

"Let's walk over to the club and see what's doing, Dad," suggested Junior, "or

better still, let's get into the canoe and paddle over, its going to be as hot as Hades presently; and the sun is blazing like a fiery furnace."

As Marvina and Mary were returning with their red, white and blue flowers from the garden, Bruce and Junior waved a good-bye from the canoe on the lake.

Just as Mary and Marvina were finishing the flower flag, which covered the entire center of the banquet table, the telephone rang.

"It's the Memorial hospital, madam; they wish to speak to Mrs. Mansfield, if possible."

III

Marvina took the receiver hurriedly from Martin.

"Hello! yes, this is Mrs. Mansfield. Yes, we are friends of Mrs. Stuart Blake."

. . . The next moment a smothered scream escaped from Marvina's lips, and Mary, seeing her turn pale, sprang to her side, and with one hand steadied her as she sank into a nearby chair, while she grasped the receiver with the other.

"Yes, hello; will you repeat the message, please?" said Mary in a trembling voice.

"There has been an automobile accident," said the voice at the other end of the wire; "Mrs. Stuart Blake, who was on her way to visit you, was killed instantly. Her two children are here—they were thrown clear of the car."

"The younger seemed to be uninjured, while the older one, Miss Virginia Blake, has a broken arm and lacerations of the body, but she was conscious when brought here, and asked us to telephone you at once, as her father was traveling and could not be reached."

"Thank you very much," said Mary, in a voice between a whisper and a sob, "we will be right over as quickly as possible," and she hung up the receiver and turned to find Marvina in a dead faint.

Mary rang for Martin, who helped her make Marvina comfortable on the couch; then she sent Martin for the maid and gave instructions to send the car to the club house at once for Mr. Mansfield and Junior, while she bathed Marvina's face with cold water, rubbed her hands, and did her best to bring her friend back to consciousness.

Presently Marvinna opened her eyes and looked up. "Ah, it is too terrible," she cried as she slowly recalled the horror of the telephone message, "what can we do?"

"We will get ready as quickly as possible and go over to the hospital. The poor children must be miserable there, among total strangers, under such tragic circumstances."

Bruce and Junior came in shortly and Marvinna explained about the accident:

"Isn't it horrible? and this was to be such a happy joyful day. Strange, how things can change in a moment from the heights of joy to black despair."

"There, my dear, be glad it was no worse," said Bruce. "Thank God, for Blake's sake, that the children were saved. Now, Junior will take you and Miss Langford over to the hospital, and in the meantime I will do my best to get in touch with Blake; he will be sure to go straight home from the train. You will be nearer the tube over there, so when I get him I will phone Junior at the hospital, and he can meet Blake at the tube station."

"Also I will be here to receive Marjory

and Doug, and break the news to them when they arrive."

With a warning to Junior to take his time and be careful, Bruce tucked the two women in the back seat of the car and watched them depart.

A cloud of depression seemed to settle over the cheerful happy household. Bruce tried several times to get Blake on the phone, but each time the answer came back, "Not home yet, sir." . . .

IV

Stuart arrived at the Grand Central Station to find the city blistering in the heat. He felt dirty and tired as he mingled with the throng in the stuffy station. Red-faced from the heat, with great beads of perspiration standing on his forehead, he jumped into a taxi and gave the address through the opened window.

As the car pulled up in front of his hotel, he sprang out, paid the driver, gave his bag to a waiting porter, and hurried up to his apartment.

The porter put the bag on a table, and

asked if there was anything more he could do.

"Yes, get out," said Blake peevishly; then he smiled and flung a tip into the black boy's hand, saying: "Tell them not to disturb me during the next half hour. I am not in to any one, and I won't answer the phone. I want to take a bath and shave undisturbed."

On the table was a note from Velora, telling him that she had waited until eight thirty, and then had gone over to the Mansfields, and asking him to phone as soon as he arrived.

"Well, I can just as well wait and phone after I rid myself of some of the train dirt," he thought, as he turned the water on and got out his shaving things.

Suddenly, there was a buzzing, grinding sound in a corner of the living-room. The shades had been left drawn, and the room was rather shadowy.

Blake stopped to listen; he left the bathroom and went into the living-room to investigate. Suddenly, a clear masculine voice spoke:

"We are broadcasting the daily news headlines from station W. A. G."

"They forgot to turn the radio off," he muttered to himself. "It's a damn spooky thing to have somebody suddenly start talking in a darkened room. Well, I might just as well be entertained while I clean up."

He went back to the bathroom, turned the water off and left the door open, so that he could hear plainly and began to shave.

"To-night at nine-thirty Captain James Williams, the famous aviator, will write the words 'Independence and Liberty' on the sky above New York City. The letters will be flaming red and each letter will be more than a mile long. So be sure to look up at nine-thirty and see 'Independence and Liberty' written in letters of flame on the sky. We are broadcasting from station W. A. G."

"How thrilling," thought Stuart: "Wonder if we will be able to see them from 'Oakdale'?"

"Wonder if there is anything to drink?"

He finished shaving and went to explore a sort of kitchenette which they had installed in a large closet of the living room. He took a bottle of gin from the cellarette, some ice from a miniature ice box, and proceeded to mix a gin ricky while the radio voice continued announcing. . . .

"From the beginning of the Dempsey Gibbons world championship boxing match we will broadcast every movement of the fight as it goes on, and the results at the end of each round."

"Seven hundred fifty piece band to head the Fifth Avenue parade. Prepare to stuff your ears with cotton."

"'All women to have vote and freedom too' is message of Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt, suffrage leader, welcomed home from abroad. She plans to help men now. 'Look at the mess they have made of politics,' says the sprightly veteran."

"Auto accident; child hurled to death in crash near Hammonton, N. J. Nicholas Landon, three years old, is dead and three others are in hospital at Atlantic City, as result of a collision of two automobiles."

"One woman and chauffeur dead and her two children injured in auto crash at Caldwell, N. J.—Mrs. Stuart Blake of New York City, was instantly killed when her car shot down the Caldwell hill and crashed into a tree at the turning of the road at the foot of the hill."

Stuart was emptying his glass, as the radio announced: "Mrs. Stuart Blake, of

New York City, was instantly killed"—the glass fell from his hands and crashed to the floor. His brain reeled, and things seemed to grow black before him, as the voice from the silent, darkened room continued. . . .

"My God," he muttered, as he stood rooted to the spot staring into space.

Then he rushed to the radio and switched it off—as though he would stop the horrible news. Then, seizing the telephone, he called frantically for Mansfield's number.

Bruce, just trying for the fifth time to get Blake, was startled by the sudden insistent ringing of the telephone, just as he was about to pick up the receiver.

"Hello,—hello," he answered.

"Oh Mansfield," came the breathless excited voice of Stuart, "I have just got the terrible news over the radio. Tell me, the—the children—will they live?"

"Yes," replied Bruce, "Violet, through some miracle, has escaped injury, except a little shaking up and scare; Virginia has a broken arm and is scratched up a bit, but not in danger."

"Thank God," came the voice earnestly, "Tell me where they are, and how can I reach them quickly?"

Bruce explained, "take the tube to Newark, Junior will be there waiting at the tube station to fetch you. I am sorry, old man, awfully sorry." . . .

Chapter 16

I

October had arrived once more with its blazing oaks, its flaming maples and gorgeous autumn flowers.

It was a glorious autumn Sunday; the sun shone brightly on the earth's serene loveliness: the wind sighed softly a benediction on the dead summer. . . .

In the breakfast room of "Awari," Bruce Mansfield, Marvinna, Stuart Blake and Mary Langford were seated at breakfast. Virginia was at college, Junior had returned to college, radiant because this was to be his finishing year. Little Violet, whom Mary had taken care of ever since she brought her home in her arms from the hospital, always had her meals in her nursery.

It had been Stuart's custom, since that fatal tragedy on the fourth of July, to come out every Saturday and spend the week-end at "Awari," where Marvinna had insisted upon keeping the children for the present.

"It's a wonderful day for a picnic," suggested Stuart, "let's take our fishing rods and some luncheon and go up in the woods near Broad Acres."

"Violet has a little cold," said Mary, "and I am afraid to take her out in the woods; it may be a bit damp and she is not quite hardened to the country yet; so I am afraid I can't go."

"We have some neighbors coming in for luncheon, I am sorry, Stuart; however Florence, the upstairs girl, is not going off to-day and she will take care of Violet, so you and Stuart can go along, Mary."

Mary blushed scarlet as Stuart said hastily; "That will be fine, get your bonnet and come along, Mary."

Half an hour later, Marvina called Bruce and smiled knowingly, pointed down the road. Stuart was carrying the rods and tackle, while Mary hugged a neat little lunch box in one arm and her own and Stuart's sweater in the other.

"You managed that very well, you little schemer," laughed Bruce: "I hope he gets her; she will make a different man out of him."

Stuart and Mary walked through the sun-

lit fields, past her own old home, which she had rented furnished, through the old gate of "Broad Acres," down deep into the autumn woods under the majestic trees, draping their curtains of crimson and gold about them.

"We will go up past the old house," said Stuart, "and I know where there used to be a fine place to fish, just about a quarter of a mile up the lake around a bend in the shore. I hope I'm not tiring you, Mary?"

"Oh, no, I love to hike," said Mary, "you remember, how we used to enjoy them, all of us kids. You remember all the flower-gathering parties in the spring? The picnics up at Silver Leaf Lake? And of course, we had the big wagon and a team for the berrying parties to the cranberry bogs, and the moonlight straw rides: but then, we always hiked on the nut-gathering parties. Ah, Stuart, home was really 'Home Sweet Home' in those days; there was very little of that restless dissatisfaction of to-day. The Mansfield house is the nearest approach to the old-fashioned home I know of."

Just then they reached the broad veranda steps of Stuart's old homestead. Uncle Bill

and Aunt Harriet, seeing their approach, came rushing out to meet them.

“Good morning, Mister Stuart; good morning, Miss Mary. Glory be ter God sah, I sho’ is glad yo done bought back de ol’ homestead.”

“Yessah, we sho is,” joined in Aunt Harriet, “When yo all gwine ter move in? We jes heerd bout yo’ buying it las’ night.”

Stuart looked at Mary’s astonished face and answered, “I don’t know, folks, but I hope to in the spring.”

He smiled at Mary as he answered; the pain had mysteriously vanished from his smile. . . .

“Won’t yo’ all come in to inspec’ yo’r property, sah? Dey tells me yo done bought de funnijur and eberting.”

“Yes, Uncle Bill, but I have not come to inspect my house to-day, thank you, we won’t go in; Miss Langford and I are going to see if they have left any fish in the old lake. By the way, I wish you and Aunt Harriet would go right on and take care of things; I will send you a check each month.”

“Yessah, we will sho’ be glad to, sah, its jes lak home ter us now, we do de bes’ we kin fo’ yo sah.”

"Alright, Uncle Bill. I will be dropping in to see you from time to time; probably see you on our way home."

II

"How wonderful of you to have the old homestead back. I think you were mean to keep such good news to yourself, Stuart."

"To tell you the truth, I did not know just how to break the news, and I don't think I realize as yet that it is really mine."

They were passing the old springhouse.

"Would you like a cool drink from the spring, Mary?"

"Yes," replied Mary.

"The water from this spring was always colder and purer than any other," Stuart said, as he handed the glass of water to Mary.

They were again confronted with the entwined letters he had cut on the beech tree so many years ago. He caught her hand as she reached for the glass.

"Mary," he said, with a stammering voice, low and tense with emotion, "Mary, I love you." . . .

She looked into his eyes for an instant

as though searching his soul; tears sprang to her eyes. Trembling from head to foot, with a glad cry she sprang into his arms.

Stuart, forgetting all about the glass of water he held, clasped her in his outstretched arms and crushed her to his heart, spilling the glass of water down her back as he did so.

"You do love me, Stuart?" she passionately cried, "you are mine at last?"

"Love you? With all my heart! I must have always loved you! It can be only a great mutual soul love that has brought us together, dear, after all these years." . . .

She lifted her head and smiled through her tears. "You know, it must be a pitiable sight to see a strong serious man and a woman of my age stammering and doing silly things. If you have a handkerchief, you may try to dry my back."

Stuart, realizing that he still had the half empty glass in his hand, laughed a happy carefree laugh for the first time in years.

"I am sorry," he apologized, as he took out his handkerchief and dried the back of her blouse as best he could, and helped her slip on her sweater.

"What do you mean 'Our Age'? I assure you, I never felt so young in my life, and you, my angel sent from Heaven, are like a beautiful new poem; you are my dream come true; a full blown rose in all the splendor of perfect womanhood."

"Stuart, what has come over you? I never knew you could be so eloquent."

"Can't you see, dear, it is not I, but your soul reflected in my heart; I am born anew of a woman's wonderful love. A love, shameless, because pure; all powerful, because enduring. From now on, God grant that our lives may broaden and entwine as the letters of our names in the bark of that tree."

He put his arm about her waist, and as they strolled off by the winding path and were lost in the deep shadows of the old oaks he bathed his soul in the radiant sunshine of her presence.

"You are like the soul of a summer day, Mary; aglow with a fresh sweet warmth, languid, restful, calm and serene; sweet as the fragrance from an old-fashioned garden."

They came to the bank of the lake, where a dam formed a picturesque waterfall.

There were fern-clad rocks and boulders, and fine old trees in all their autumn glory.

At the lower end of the falls a fine old oak tree spread its dense shady foliage far over the rushing water. On the upper side of this old tree lay a big boulder, resting against its trunk, and deeply imbedded in a mass of moss and sweet smelling ferns.

"You remember the spot, don't you, dear? I always thought it the most beautiful on the old place; we used to get some very fine fish here."

"Indeed I do remember it," replied Mary. "That used to be my throne," pointing to the boulder, "and I shall mount it once more in state."

She climbed on the rock, sat down and leaned her bare head against the tree. Stuart leaned against the rock, looking up at her with eyes through which the yearning and longing, the hunger for the joys of Life, were expressed as in passionate appeal.

"What a picture she makes under the shade of that mighty oak, her soft black dress clinging about her like a queen in mourning robes," thought Stuart.

Her throat was bare, revealing its ivory whiteness; her cheeks were flushed and her

hair, which seemed woven from the silver spray of the waterfall, loose and wind blown; strayed in hundreds of ringlets about her face and neck.

Stuart gazed at her in speechless admiration. Suddenly he said: "I did not mean to speak to you yet, Mary; I tried to wait in patience until my year of mourning was up. I don't want the children to think that I was ever lacking in respect to their mother. . . . God knows, I have tried to do my duty like a man; I have suffered enough for getting fuddled in my youth and taking the wrong road. Through all the struggles and heartaches, I have never lost sight of duty, and if I have been unable to laugh through it, at least I have never whimpered; but surely, I have paid my penalty. When I saw you standing there by the old tree, with our names interwoven and realized that I was free—well it just burst out, that's all dear, and now won't you name the day? I would like the Spring, because that is the time when all nature seems to be homing and surely there will be no unpleasant gossip if I wait that long. Shall we say May, dear heart?"

She softly slipped her hand into his; he

bent over and kissed it, while a tear stole down her cheek. Then, in a trembling voice, she murmured: "I have waited more than twenty years for you, dear . . . and I would wait . . . forever. Since that summer day, when I was only sixteen, when you were about to speak the words you have just spoken, I have waited, loving you always." . . .

"I love this old home, where my girlhood love for you was born . . . every tree, every flower, every blade of grass, . . . every shadow on the old ice house . . . every winding path and quiet dell, because they bring memories of you, and I will be yours whenever you come to claim me." . . .

He seated himself on the boulder by her side, drew her to his heart, and pressed his mouth to her full soft lips. . . .

His whole being tingled with the thrill of the first kiss he had ever received from a woman's soul.

Chapter 17

I

May, surely the most beautiful month of the year, brought another wedding day to "Awari."

On the second of May, while the sunbeams danced in the blossoms, warming the awakened earth, Mary stood before her mirror, while Marvina helped to arrange her wedding veil with its crown of orange blossoms.

"You are the most radiantly beautiful bride I have ever seen," cried Marvina, when the last touch was given to the old lace and Mary had taken her bridal bouquet, ready to descend the stairs, "and certainly the most unusual one, with the orange blossoms nestling in your silver hair, and your face like a rose bud, you don't look a day over twenty.

"Those ladies of Louis XVI's court knew what they were about, when they donned their white wigs and little patches."

"You quite overwhelm me, my dear, with your kindness and compliments. Do you think he will think **me** beautiful?"

"He thinks you are always beautiful, and so you are," replied Marvina.

After the ceremony, when Mary had changed into her traveling dress, she rushed up to the nursery to clasp little Violet to her heart and kiss her goodbye, and to give the new nurse all sorts of instructions as to the care of the child.

"Where are you going, Ree?" lisped the child, "Pleathe tum back thoon."

"Yes, darling, I will, and then I will take you home, to our very own home." She kissed the child once more and was gone.

Surely, fiction has no miracles such as are found in real life. . . . In Stuart, a metamorphosis had taken place; a dead soul had been resurrected by love and happiness.

How brightly the sun shone for him on that May morning at the station; how his every nerve tingled and his blood burned, and how all the glamor and busy strife about him were swept away and forgotten, at the sight of the sweet face of his lovely bride . . .

"You can have that cottage of mine at

the seaside for your honeymoon," Stuart's uncle had said a few weeks before the wedding, "we are not going down until June."

II

In the cottage by the sea, alone for the first time since she had become his, Stuart held her in his arms!

"Mine . . . my very own" . . . he whispered, "my own sweet wife! and what a treasured possession you are."

Thus they began their honeymoon in the pretty cottage with its sloping lawn facing the wave-kissed shore.

All in all to each other . . . Alone, save for a visiting maid who came and went with the day. The hours flew by, on wings of happiness. At night, through the opened windows, came the lullaby of waves. There was sweet communion of mind and mutual confession of a great, infinite love, which waiting had only welded and thrice fastened.

There were long walks on the beach, moonlight strolls while they gazed in silent admiration at the wondrous highway of shimmering silver, illuminating white sails far out on the world rim.

All things beautiful were theirs—the music of the birds, wealth of blossoms; love of life and joy of love.

The little love-nest became a fairy castle over which ruled a queen, whose feminine charm and personality were everywhere.

A fairy castle by an enchanted sea, set with phantom sails and celestial silver, across which a shimmering path led up to Heaven!

The last evening in the honeymoon sanctuary had arrived. The air was laden with the perfume of spring blossoms; Mary was sitting at the piano, softly singing. Stuart leaned against the open window in the twilight.

"Through the magic of her voice shines her very soul," he thought.

"Love hath a language all its own, which music interprets marvelously." He watched and listened in ecstasy.

How sweet her face in the twilight; how beautiful her throat and arms; fairy fingers gifted with a touch as light and beautiful as the harmonies they invoked . . . and that voice of the soul, telling of love divine . . . of mutual trust, appreciation and understanding . . . of sweet joys, aesthetic bliss; of the wine of passion quaffed

from a brimming cup, while the brain reels, and the heart halts . . . of a love which they knew would live through all eternity.

Stuart rose and stood by his wife at the piano. She finished her song and looked up into his face . . . He took her in his arms and kissed her. "Just think I am taking you home tomorrow!"

"Yes dear, to our own home," said Mary. "I am drunk with happiness, and I want you to know, dear, that I do not regret all the loneliness and heartaches of the past, because through them, the present is; because of them I can drink deeper of the fountain of happiness."

III

It was Stuart's first day at the office. Mary, in her new home, was busy as the bees in the blossoms of the apple trees by her window.

Marvina motored over at her request, and brought Violet and her nurse.

After an affection greeting, Mary begged her friend to stay for luncheon.

"No dear, I am sure you must be far too busy preparing all for Stuart's first homing;

some other time. I have brought you some old-fashioned plants, which I know you are fond of: there are some Sweet Williams, Petunias, Bleeding Hearts and August Lilies."

"Thank you so much, you are always so sweet and thoughtful, dear! I will get Joe to dig a place along the border of the lake and I will plant them myself."

They said good-bye and Mary picked little Violet up in her arms and kissed her again and again.

"You may unpack Violet's things, please, Nora, and put her nursery in order. I will take her out with me, while you tidy up her things!"

"Does the ghost of the cottage still visit the place at sunset," inquired Marvina, as old Uncle Bill respectfully opened the door of her car.

"No mam, Mister Stuart done had de bodies ob that woman and her baby moved to de cemetery on de hill side at Valley View and now she done res' in peace, jes like I say; I sho' is glad, mam."

As Marvina's car went gliding down the hillside past the ruins of the little cottage she smiled a little sadly and wondered .

Mary put on a garden hat, took the basket of plants on her arm, and holding the child's hand went out into the garden. There she planted her flowers, while she listened to the childish prattle of little golden-haired, blue-eyed Violet.

IV

"You did stay sush a long time, Ree," pouted the child.

"Never mind, I am never going to leave you any more," she replied as she patted the wee golden head.

"You know—Auntie Marvie say, you are married to my Daddy—and you are my—Muvver now."

"She did? Well, what do you think of that Violet dear?"

"Oh, I am glad—cause, now I have you and Daddy ever' day!"

She clasped her hands and laughed. Then she hesitated and became pensive. After a rather long pause she said, "I call you—muvver—Ree? Yes?"

"Yes dear, if you like."

"Well—well—Muvver-Ree—, what you plantin'?"

“That is an old-fashioned flower, called ‘Bleeding Heart’,” answered Mary, as she watered the roots and patted the fresh soil around the plant.

Violet thought for a moment and then inquired,—“Well—Well! Muvver-Ree—will ah—ah—it have heart bleed on it when it blooms?”

Mary laughed; a musical happy laugh: “No, dear, it has beautiful red flowers; you will see it when it blooms.” As she finished planting the flowers she stooped and kissed the child tenderly.

“Come, dear, we will go down by the brook at the foot of the hill and I will show you some mocking birds building their nest and we will gather dogwood and wild azaleas for the vases at home.”

They walked down the winding path under a canopy of apple blossoms: a prattling glad-hearted child, a listening happy woman.

At seven o'clock Violet was being put to bed by her nurse. Mary had gone to see that all was in order for the first dinner at home with her beloved.

Coming out into the hall, she heard a rather rebellious voice from the nursery.

"I'm not sleepy,—I want my Muvver-Ree; see, sun way up,—don't wanna go sleep."

Mary rushed upstairs. "What is the matter, Nora?"

"It's the daylight-saving, Madam, that gets us into trouble: it's so light at seven, Madam, I always have the same trouble."

"Yes, but the day has been quite long enough for a little girl. Everything is going to rest; the birds, the butterflies—even the flowers close their petals and sleep."

"Well—well, Muvver-Ree, if you sing to me like you did before you go 'way,—then I try go 'sleep."

"Very well, dear heart," replied Mary, as she kissed the child goodnight, "Now I will sing to you, while the sandman comes through the window and takes you away to slumber land on the moonbeams. Leave the door open, Nora, so that Violet can hear me from the living room. Good night!"

V

Stuart's car was at the station, one of the many cars awaiting the tired men coming

home. He sprang into the seat next to the chauffeur and started off in the procession with the others, all homing after a day's hard toil.

They passed a truckload of workmen going home with a merry song on their lips, happy and contented.

Upon arriving at the old homestead, they turned through the iron gate, and as the car went spinning up the old familiar drive under the ancient oaks in their spring dress of emerald green against the tender blue of the sky, his heart was singing a glad song of joy.

The orchards were a riot of pink-tinted blossoms—the setting sun turned the brooks a rose color, as they laughed under the blossoming boughs—A bird sang his evening love-song to its mate, down deep in the shady dell . . . Through the fine old trees Stuart caught a glimpse of Joe, driving the cows home from the woodland pasture.

And there, on the gently rising hill, on the banks of that beautiful lake, rose his old homestead. . . .

“My home,” thought Stuart, with a heart full of tenderness. “How wonderfully peaceful, with its background of lake and

blossoming trees, looking down at me from its throne upon the hill."

He leaped out of the car, as it stopped at the entrance and rushed upon the porch. He stopped suddenly and turned around, anxious to have one more glance at Nature's unspoiled loveliness. . . .

A bluebird dropped down from the highest bough of the old cherry tree to the side of its mate on a lower bough, scattering a shower of blossoms in its flight. Softly, with its head erect, it struck the first note of its love song . . . then as its mate fluttered about among the blossoms, its notes grew higher and higher, until the old tree rang with its melody.

The crimson hues of the setting sun were fading into purple and amber . . . In the far distance, a lonely dove on tired wings . . .

He leaned against the wall of his home and removed his hat as though in silent prayer:

"I know, Heaven is no better or more beautiful than this," whispered Stuart, "and I know, that love and religion are one and the same. I thank Thee God, for my redemption. I have been purified; shorn of

my weakness, and triumphant through love." . . .

Mary's silvery voice came floating through the open window, like a beautiful benediction:

"All things come home at eventide,
Like birds that weary of their roaming."

THE END

770





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